

Alliance

How Much Corn is in Your Poop?

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When feeding grain-fed veal, a lot can be told about the health of your veal by the manure. Appearance-colour, texture-consistency, and content particle size are good indicators of gut health. Digestion and rumen function are critical to veal growth.

For grain-fed veal farmers healthy rumen function is critical to performance and average daily gain (ADG). Since grain-fed veal are primarily fed a corn and supplement diet it is critical that the rumen functions effectively. Recently, some grain-fed veal farmers have been offering free choice chopped straw as a feed option for veal to eat. The free choice straw has a benefit to rumen health by stimulating rumination.

By stimulating the rumen it prevents large amounts of undigested feed – in particular corn – to pass out of the rumen which could lead to extensive fermentation in the hindgut (cecum and large intestine). This fermentation could lead to gas and acid production. Ionophores like Rumensin can be added to feed to help reduce methane gas production from the gut.

One point to keep in mind if you do incorporate straw into your veal diet then you should continue. Veal like consistency in their ration. If it is included, leave it. Starting and stopping foodstuffs is hard on digestion for veal. When feeding straw to stimulate chewing the straw should be greater than 2" in length.

When feeding veal another important point to keep in mind is chewing. Chewing is the key to digestion.

When grain-fed veal are chewing corn they produce saliva which contains enzymes like salivary amylase that speed up the digestive process. Saliva also stimulates taste and provides a buffer for digestion acting similar to baking soda and helps prevent bloat.

The corn for grain-fed veal should be whole-shelled corn without fines. Too many fines in the feed reduce chewing and, therefore, a reduction in saliva production could lead to bloat. Fines should be screened out and avoided. Fines can also be created by pelleted supplements. If the pelleted supplement is not hard enough the pellets will crumble also leading to increased fines. One thing to keep in mind with pellets is that the ends are soft and fragile so excessive handling (auguring, mixing and distribution) can lead to break down. It is also important to keep in mind about moisture migration from the corn to the pellet, over time this could also contribute to the fines.

When checking pens, not only are you checking on the health of your veal calves, you should be checking the veal for cud chewing, what the manure looks like and the quality of the feed in the bunk. The manure should be checked for appearance, consistency and particle size, in particular corn. If there is a lot of whole corn in the manure this means the calf has not chewed enough.

Possible reasons the calf is not chewing enough could be:

- Overcrowding, are the veal lying down enough ruminating
- Are the calves in the pen uniform
- Is there enough bunk space

When checking manure in the pen the manure should be consistent within a group of veal receiving the same ration.

At the current price of corn you want to make sure all the corn is being digested to maximize ADG. Feed management is very important to improve rumen health. On your next pen check have a close look at the manure and see how much corn is in your poop.

When assessing feed you want to ensure that your feed looks similar to the photo on the bottom right with no fines and the pellets are formed. If you have feed that looks like the feed in the bottom left photo you would want to contact your feed representative as soon as possible to get new feed.



Too many fines in veal calf feed rations (left) reduce chewing and saliva production, which can lead to bloat, causing decreased feed intake and average daily gain, whereas the feed ration on the right has pellets that are still intact.