



Changing With the Times

Kendra Keels, Director, Producer & Industry Development

Livestock production is always changing, to improve the health and welfare of animals, to improve labour and efficiency, or to achieve other goals. Consumers have become interested in where their food comes from and how it was raised before it got to their plate.

The Code of Practice is one way veal producers can assure the public that veal cattle are raised according to a standard of care that is based on science and promotes animal welfare while being practical and manageable for producers. The Codes of Practice are nationally developed guidelines for the care and handling of the different species of farm animals. They are intended to promote sound management and welfare practices through recommendations and requirements for housing, management, transportation, and other animal husbandry practices.

As veal producers, it is our job to assess how we can improve welfare while maintaining production. There is a fine balance between the two. Two areas that are under scrutiny in veal production are the use of tethers and individual stalls for the whole production cycle.

Tethers are not commonly used in Ontario for the whole production cycle however; they are used on some farms to start calves in individual housing. Traditionally, tethers and individual stalls were used to help producers have better access to calves, however these production methods are no longer acceptable to consumers and there is pressure to change.

In 2010, Costco implemented a policy which prohibited purchasing veal cattle that were tethered or raised in stalls for their entire production cycle. This was a result of activist pressure in the United States and that policy created by Costco caused a ripple effect throughout the veal industry across North America. This initiative by Costco carried over to most retailers in Canada purchasing veal, both milk-fed and grain-fed, and can be found in Corporate Social Responsibility Reports from most retailers.

On March 6, 2015, a Code of Practice Development committee was established to update the Code of Practice for the care and handling of Veal Cattle. A great deal of time and effort from the code's 20 members has been put into the new Code and it is now ready for public comment. The comment period runs from December 12th until February 14th, 2017. The public comment period is open to anyone with an interest in Canadian agriculture, from consumers to producers. Every comment that is submitted is shared with the Code of Practice Development committee and considered carefully and changes to the Code are made as needed. Following the review of public comments, a final Code is published, setting the industry standards for the care of veal cattle across Canada. The final Code is expected to be available in Fall 2017.

The draft Code addresses every aspect of veal farming. This includes the issues of tethers and housing veal cattle individually for the entire production cycle. The draft requirements outline an ambitious timeline for phasing out these housing systems, however, we must keep in mind that the transition to group housing has already begun for many producers. Ontario veal farmers have been upgrading their housing on farm and transitioning away from tethering over the last ten years.

The draft requirements around the use of tethers and individual housing for the entire production cycle state:

- Effective July 2018, in new or renovated facilities
 - Calves must be housed in groups as young as possible and not later than 8 weeks of age. Time in stalls can only be extended to protect the health of individual calves.
 - Individual housing must, by design or management, allow calves to turn completely around, groom, adopt sternal and lateral resting postures, easily stand up and lie down and have visual and physical contact with other cattle.
 - Housing must not be designed to permit tethering and calves in new or renovated facilities must not be tethered.

- Effective December 2020, all farms must comply with the Code's housing requirements
 - Calves must be housed in groups as young as possible and not later than 8 weeks of age. Time in stalls can only be extended to protect the health of individual calves.
 - Individual housing must, by design or management, allow calves to turn completely around, groom, adopt sternal and lateral resting postures, easily stand up and lie down and have visual and physical contact with other cattle.
 - Tethering is prohibited

A workshop has been planned for January 18, 2017 to work together through the draft Veal Cattle code and submit comments on the requirements. It is important that you take the time to review the draft Code and submit comments as this directly impacts your farm business. This can be done on your own or you can come to the workshop to review and comment on the draft Code with other veal producers. As

veal producer who will be following the Code in your daily life, it is important that your perspective is included in the feedback given to the Code Development committee, and is ultimately reflected in the final Code.

Market demands are changing and we need to change with them. If we want to continue to market our veal we need to produce the product our consumers want. We must always remember consumers have many choices when it comes to protein choices – consumer demand drives our production.

The draft code can be found <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/veal-cattle>. If you have any questions about the Code please do not hesitate to contact me kkeels@livestockalliance.ca. ■



It's more than just milk replacer.

It's backed by an experienced Purina team. Invest in your future today!

Experience the Purina Difference.



PURINA®, CHOW® and the Checkerboard design are licensed trademarks of Nestlé Purina PetCare Company. CowSignals® is a Registered Trademark of the CowSignals® Training Company.

