



FACTS ABOUT OUR FOOD

~ VEAL ~

Veal is meat from young dairy calves, and is a by-product of the dairy industry. Calves may be taken from their mothers when they are only a few hours old.

OVERVIEW

Veal is a by-product of the dairy industry. Dairy cows must be impregnated annually to continue producing milk for human consumption resulting in many unwanted offspring. Separating a cow and her calf causes them both significant distress. Female calves usually replace their mothers on dairy farms, but males are unwanted, so they are sold for meat (veal). Male calves are typically taken from their mothers when they are only a few hours old, to be then shipped and raised for veal. In 2012, 335,000 calves were slaughtered for veal in Canada. Most veal production is in Quebec and Ontario.

THREE TYPES OF VEAL

“Bob” veal: Calves are slaughtered at a few days old, to less than four weeks old. “Bob” calves suffer 15-20% pre-slaughter mortality due to stress and illness.

Milk-fed veal: Calves are fed only milk-based feed, to produce “gourmet” white meat, and slaughtered at approximately five months old. About 30% of Canada’s veal is milk-fed, with calves slaughtered at 18 – 20 weeks.

Grain-fed veal: Calves are fed milk based feed for six weeks, then grain, hay or other solid food. The meat may be marketed as calf rather than veal. They are slaughtered at five – six months of age.

LIFE SENTENCE ON THE FACTORY FARM

There are three types of housing systems for veal calves: **hutches, crates (stalls) and group pens.**

In **veal crates or stalls**, calves are confined, alone, in small wooden crates so small they can barely move, causing great deprivation and major welfare concerns for the calves. They cannot take more than one step forward or back, and they cannot stretch, turn around or lie down comfortably. They may, or not, be tethered. As they grow, their space becomes smaller. The normally social calves have no contact with other calves. While they may be able to see their companions, they cannot touch them. They are prevented from exercising and kept deliberately low on iron so their flesh stays pale. They spend their short lives severely confined indoors with prolonged sensory and social deprivation so their meat will be tender. There is no federal ban on veal crates in Canada.

Hutches, or “igloos” are less restrictive than stalls, but do not come close to meeting the natural needs of a calf. Here the calves are chained to tiny igloo-like structures outside. Though their leads are long enough to allow them access to the outdoors, they are not long enough to allow them to socialize with the calves on either side of them. The lack of stimulation and social activity must cause extreme loneliness and frustration.

Pens allow animals to be together in **groups**. Pens with wood slats are dirty, causing the calves’ bodies to be stained by urine and feces. Disease prevention is a problem in these conditions. Bedding may be non-existent. Calves are housed, very often under artificial light, and may never see the light of day. Since calves often live in poorly lit, crowded and stressful environments, bullying can occur.

Canada’s voluntary *Recommended Code of Practice for Veal (1998)* states that “light of sufficient intensity for the calves to observe one another is recommended for a minimum of 8 hours within a 24 hour period.” This means producers may keep the calves in darkness two thirds of the time.

All of these “management systems” frustrate the natural instincts inherent in calves: to suckle, frolic in the fresh air and be close to their mothers. The Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals believes that none of these systems satisfies calves’ basic needs.

PHYSICAL AILMENTS

Veal calves live unhealthy lives, particularly those that are milk-fed. Most calves suffer from anemia due to lack of iron in their diet. It is the lack of iron that keeps their flesh pink and tender. Because the calves crave iron, it is not uncommon for them to lick the metallic parts of their stalls.



Veal calves housed in individual crates

Formula-fed calves are not given water so they will drink more high-fat liquid milk-substitute to satisfy their thirst. Normally calves will suckle their mothers up to 16 times a day, but in confinement, they are given a bucket of formula twice a day. Drinking from a bucket, rather than suckling, causes problems because the milk may go into the calf’s rumen rather than their stomach. As a result, the calf can endure indigestion and diarrhea. Veal calves can also suffer from chronic pneumonia, “scours”, and lameness due to lack of exercise.

BEHAVIOURAL DEPRIVATION

The behavioural urge to suckle is denied calves that are bucket-fed, sometime leading to abnormal sucking of the pen or pen mates (in the case of group housing). This is exacerbated when calves are “limit-fed”, that is, undernourished and given less milk than they desire

TRANSPORTATION

After calves are separated from their mothers, they are loaded into trucks and shipped to sales barns or veal barns. As they are very young and weak, the experience must cause tremendous stress and fear. When they reach slaughter age, they are shipped again to the auction block or slaughterhouse.

During transportation, calves are often handled roughly when being loaded in and out of trucks, endure long journeys without food or water, and experience inclement weather without proper shelter. They are transported in close confinement with other veal calves, and are susceptible to disease. Calves may be shipped 18 hours without water, food or rest in most instances.

GLOBAL PROGRESS

In 1996 the European Union banned veal crates, phasing them out in 2007. In 1997, the EU set minimum standards for the care of veal calves, including provision of iron and fibrous food, plus crates large enough to allow calves to lie down, rest, stand up and groom themselves without difficulty.

IMPROVEMENTS

Group pen facilities that provide adequate bedding, such as straw, plus ventilation and separate resting and exercise areas are more humane than crate and hutch systems.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- 1) Cut out or cut back on veal consumption.
- 2) Educate friends and family about veal production practices.
- 3) Encourage only group housing with bedding for veal calves.
- 4) Ask grocers to sell only veal from group-housed calves with bedding.



Veal calves housed in a group housing system

For more information, please contact us.

Mail: 131 Bloor Street West, Suite 200/140, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5S 1R8

Email: info@humanefood.ca Website: www.humanefood.ca