Associations between the general condition of culled dairy cows and their selling price at Ontario auction markets

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Introduction:
- In 2016, the 28 licensed stockyards in Ontario sold ~116,000 culled cows
- Disease or injury is often associated with the reason(s) for culling
- If a cow is sick or injured it may not be able to cope well, with transport

Study objectives:
- Assess the general physical condition of culled dairy cows being sold at Ontario auction markets
- Determine whether their condition related to their sale price

Methods:
- Data were collected at 3 Ontario auction markets for 16 weeks (4460 cows)
- Every dairy cow sold was assessed for:
  - Body condition score (BCS)
  - Gait score
  - Hock injury score
  - Presence or absence of a tail
  - Bodyweight (kg) + sale price ($/kg)

Results:
- 27% of cows had a hock injury with swelling > 2.5 cm and/or a lesion
- 40% of cows had a BCS ≤ 2
- 72% of cows had an abnormal gait
- 12% of cows had a docked tail

Relationship of condition to price:
- Cows with BCS ≤ 2 sold for $0.20 less/kg (P < 0.001)
- Cows with an abnormal gait sold for $0.04 less/kg (P < 0.001)

Summary:
- This is the first benchmark of the condition of culled cows sold at Ontario auction markets
- Cull cows were often sold in less than optimal condition according to industry standards
- Both low BCS and abnormal gait, were associated with a reduced sale price

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