

Cull cow management on Ontario dairy farms

Summary of a survey in 2021

By Joanne Marshall

Ontario dairy farmers must regularly remove animals from their herd by culling. Through a provincial survey of 248 dairy farmers, researchers at the University of Guelph found opportunities for improvement of management of cows leaving dairy farms.

Most (62%) respondents had a written standard operating procedure for shipping cows, but those with this protocol use it less than half (48%) of the time.

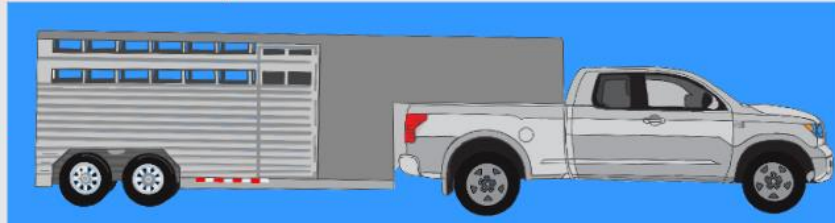
A veterinarian was involved in the development of cull cow protocols for 47% of respondents. Yet, the only information source for cull cow management that respondents identified as being 'important' or 'very important' was veterinarians. With veterinarians' expertise and farmers' trust, there is room for increased communications to improve culling decisions and meet regulatory requirements.

In 2020, new regulations in the Health of Animals Act were put into place to reduce the risk of cows having udder engorgement during transportation. Most (66%) of

There is room for improvement in cull cow management on farms

Opportunity to increase veterinarian's involvement in cull cow management decisions

Ensure cows are fit for the journey from the farm



respondents were familiar with these changes, but only 20% of respondents completed dry-off before transport.

While this might not be needed for cows producing little milk or for short journeys, changes may be needed to plan ahead for transport.

Preparation for successful transport can also include changing feed or housing for cows ahead of culling, which were used by 15 to 25% of respondents.

Most respondents indicated high agreement (at least 8 out of 10) that their culled cows arrived at slaughter in the condition they left the farm. However, earlier data showed that it takes several days from leaving

the farm to slaughter for some cows. There is a risk for deterioration in condition for culled dairy cows on their journey to a slaughter facility.

This research highlighted areas of opportunity for awareness and practices to improve health and welfare for cull cows.

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Further information on the study can be accessed in the journal [Frontiers](#). For more information on this study, contact Dr. Todd Duffield, Department of Population Medicine, at tduffiel@uoquelfh.ca.

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University of Guelph ON N1G 2W1
dairyatguelph.ca

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