

Ontario bovine veterinarians' knowledge and perspectives on cull cow management

By Joanne Marshall

Summary of a survey in 2021

Recent attention to the fitness of cull dairy cows entering the beef industry points to a need for attention to management on farms. Using a survey of cattle veterinarians in Ontario, researchers at the University of Guelph explored how bovine veterinarians may help to provide solutions.

Of the cows they examined, survey respondents identified the most common reasons for culling: production (22%), lameness (20%), and other illness or injury (17%).

Most respondents (58%) were satisfied with their knowledge of current cull cow transportation regulations, and the majority of respondents (83%) indicated being familiar with relevant changes to the Health of Animals Act.

Although industry groups recommend consultation with veterinarians in culling decisions, most respondents (89%) indicated being involved just 'some of the time'. Meanwhile, most respondents (56%) indicated a desire to be involved in individual culling decisions with farmers 'most of the time'.

Dairy farms are required to have a standard operating procedure for the shipment of cattle.



Greater veterinary consultation in culling decisions and management may improve the fitness of dairy cows entering the beef supply.



Yet, on average, respondents indicated the proportion of their clients' SOP's they had viewed, assisted in establishing, or assisted in updating were 36%, 30%, and 29%, respectively.

Research suggests that if cull dairy cows arrive at auctions or slaughter plants with a compromised condition, some contributing factors likely arose at the farm of origin. Responding veterinarians indicated that the farm of origin was an important variable for management of cull cows.

Reflecting this, most respondents (67%) indicated that education of producers was most important to the welfare of culled cows

Most respondents (57%) indicated that local slaughter was among the most important factors for cull cow welfare. Veterinarians appear to recognize the importance of the "direct to slaughter" path for cull cows' welfare.

We found bovine veterinarians recognize the major risks to cull cow welfare and were confident in their knowledge of the topic.

Greater involvement of veterinarians with farmers in cull cow management decisions may improve regulatory compliance and animal welfare.

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Further information on the study can be accessed in the [Journal of Dairy Science](#).

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