

BOBBY CALVES – FIT FOR SALE

Calves are essential for dairy farming and must be managed with care. Sound animal husbandry practices and management systems are the key to delivering bobby calves' welfare and ensuring they are fit for sale.

Animal welfare requirements apply to all calves born on dairy farms, whether they are destined for the milking herd, rearing elsewhere for dairy beef or for slaughter as veal. Because many bobby calves are slaughtered at a young age, it's important to make sure husbandry practices – especially antibiotic use – don't affect their saleability, or our meat industry's reputation.

Every bobby calf presented for slaughter must be free from antibacterial drug residues, and their treatment must meet animal welfare requirements. It's important, not just for your own dairy business but also to protect public health and maintain the Australian dairy industry's access to export markets.

Rearing bobby calves

Calves are an essential component of all dairy enterprises. Their health and care ensures industry sustainability.

Practices that deliver healthy bobby calves that are fit for sale include providing quality feeding, environment and housing, managing residues and following the Bovine Johne's Disease 3-step calf rearing plan.

Because bobby calves must be free of any antibiotic residues (see below), preventing diseases is by far a better approach than treatment.

Welfare responsibilities

Bobby calves are young animals that are dependant on you. People who care for bobby calves should read and comply with the relevant animal welfare code of practice. Contact your local Department of Agriculture for more information on the relevant code in your State.

Feeding

Ensure that every newly-born calf receives adequate colostrum from its dam or from another newly-calved cow within its first day of life, and particularly in the first six hours after birth.

Bobby calves must receive food and fluids for maintenance and growth, to minimise periods of hunger, and for disease prevention.

Environment and housing

Young calves are particularly susceptible to cold, wet and windy weather. Even healthy strong calves can die, if exposed to harsh conditions.

Once removed from the dam, bobby calves should be protected from extreme conditions. They should be housed separately from heifers to be reared, yet still receive similar care. Housing should have:

- Floors that are easy to clean and disinfect (eg. concrete or slated).
- Deep litter for calf comfort (not tanned sawdust or shavings which are toxic).
- Suitable ventilation to remove toxic gasses and dust.
- Enough space for all animals to lie down comfortably.
- Internal fittings constructed to avoid hazards.

Bovine Johne's Disease

Industry recommends that all calves on the farm should be reared according to the Bovine Johne's Disease (BJD) 3-step calf rearing plan, regardless of their final destination.

For more information on the 3-step calf rearing plan, refer to flyer 3-steps to minimise BJD risk in your herd

Residue management

To protect public health and Australia's meat exports, animals destined for slaughter must be free of antibiotic residues.

Meat processors demand that farmers provide assurances that farm management systems prevent drug residues. National monitoring programs test 5% of all bobby calves slaughtered.

How to handle treated calves

If a bobby calf is treated or exposed to drugs, it must be withheld from the trade in accordance with the drug manufacturers instructions. During this time, bobby calves should be fed milk or milk replacers that are free from antibacterials. Milk from cows treated with dry cow therapy is also subject to withholding periods, (some are 49 days) special attention is required for calves born during the dry cow WHP.

Antibiotics and contamination

To prevent antibacterial drug residues in bobby calves farmers should:

- Separate sick calves to avoid spreading infection.
- Seek veterinary advice for treatment of sick calves.
- Use fluid replacement (electrolyte therapy) as appropriate because this has no withholding period
- Follow quality assurance measures by identifying and segregating treated animals, recording treatments and observing withhold periods (WHP).
- Only sell bobby calves for slaughter after the meat WHP.
- Ensure bobby calves for sale are not fed milk with antibiotic residues from mastitis treatments.
- Clean all utensils and containers used to treat calves.

Antibacterial residues may occur in bobby calves when:

- The calf is treated for scours or pneumonia with antibacterial drugs.
- The calf drinks milk from a cow that has been treated for mastitis or with dry cow treatment.
- Or the calf drinks milk that has been exposed to contaminated equipment used for treatment of other calves.

Record management

As part of your on-farm quality assurance (QA) program, records for each calf born should include calf ID, dam ID, date of birth, sex, birth weight, ailments and treatments and antibiotics administered (including WHP).

Identification

The National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS) is Australia's system for identifying and tracking beef and dairy cattle. It provides trace forward and trace back of animals.

All states require identification of bobby calves and most require a white NLIS Breeder Tag before they leave their property of birth.

Transport

Fit to Load

Bobby calves destined for transport to processors must be in their fifth day of life or older, be free of drug residues and be fed within six hours prior to delivery to the point of sale or collection. They should be bright, robust, and able to rise unassisted. They should not be lethargic, listless or immature. Sick or injured calves must be treated appropriately or humanely destroyed.

Common indicators that calves are fit to transport to processors include dry withered navel cords, more than 23 kg liveweight and hooves that are firm and worn flat.

Transport facilities

During transport, bobby calves must have protection from excess heat, sun, wind and rain in a vehicle with an enclosed front and that provides effective ventilation. During cold weather, additional actions should be taken to protect calves from cold stress and wind chill during transport.

Further information:

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Sound dairy husbandry delivers
good animal welfare

The Australian Dairy Industry – we care about animal welfare