

THE AMERICAN VEAL INDUSTRY: Facts About the Care and Feeding of Calves

Many people outside of the veal industry have expressed concerns about the feeding and housing of veal calves. But animal scientists, veterinarians and the Animal Health Committee of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) support industry practices based on their special understanding of a calf's nutritional needs and behavior and the propensity for young calves to develop disease.

Calf Nutrition: A Balanced Diet

Veal calves receive a highly nutritious diet designed for optimum growth and good health. This diet is based upon nutritional standards established by a number of government agencies and professional organizations, including the AVMA and the National Research Council.

Veal calves receive special milk replacement formulas designed to provide all of the 40 essential nutrients they need, including important amino acids, carbohydrates, fats, minerals and vitamins. According to experts, it is most natural for young calves to consume only a liquid diet because their digestive systems need to mature before they can handle solid food. Veal calves receive diets with sufficient iron to meet the animals' requirements for normal health and behavior. Farmers are

careful to provide sufficient iron to their calves, recognizing that an early clinical symptom of anemia is poor appetite — a calf that does not eat will not grow.

The best evidence that veal calves are healthy is the excellent growth rate and very low mortality of special-fed veal calves. The typical veal calf gains an average of 2.5 pounds or more per day. Further, based upon a report issued by the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, the calf mortality rate on veal farms is one of the lowest in animal agriculture.

Guidelines for Calf Housing

The AVMA, animal scientists and agricultural engineers have worked with the industry to develop specific guidelines for veal calf care and production. These guidelines support the practice of raising calves in

*... veal calves
have one of
the lowest
mortality
rates in
agriculture.*

individual stalls because it allows farmers to carefully monitor and control the calf's nutritional and health status. Calves have a very strong sucking instinct and contact between calves, combined with the calves' tendency for drinking urine, greatly increases their likelihood of contracting disease. In fact, studies show that calves raised in groups have from two to 14 times the disease rate of individually-penned calves. For this and other reasons — including ease of cleaning and feeding — veal calves are housed individually in their own pens.

In addition to supporting the use of individual stalls, the AVMA guidelines also call for well-insulated, well-ventilated barns with supplementary heating systems and levels of indoor lighting — either natural or artificial — maintained so that the calves can be seen easily. Each stall is constructed so that the calves will have adequate room to stand, stretch, step forward, backward, and from side to side, lie in a natural position and groom themselves. Slotted flooring is provided for comfort and cleanliness. Modern veal stalls allow the animals to have visual and physical interaction with their neighbors. This means that the calves are not socially isolated but are assured of receiving their own feed, individual care and attention

Benefits of Calf Housing

With the level of management afforded by the individual stall method, veal farmers are able to inspect each calf several times a day and provide individual care whenever it is needed. The result is a very low mortality rate for veal calves because of the opportunities farmers have to enhance their calves' health and welfare. As the AVMA's animal welfare committee concluded in a

March 1989 position paper, individual stall housing offers a number of important benefits, including:

- implementation of good preventive medical procedures;
- observation of each animal at least twice daily;
- reduction in calf losses due to disease; and
- complete parasite control.

The ultimate goal of veal farmers is to raise healthy calves in a humane manner. To achieve this goal, farmers and veterinarians use nutritionally-balanced diets and individual stalls to facilitate frequent

observation and careful management of the calf's nutritional and health status. The individual stall method also protects the animals from adverse environmental conditions, parasites and predators. For these reasons, the individual stall method is considered a humane practice that ensures the health of calves.

*Calves
are not
socially
isolated, but
are assured
of receiving
their own
feed,
individual
care and
attention.*