

Calf Mortality and Morbidity in Central Europe and Canada: Comparative Incidence, Producers' Estimates and Management Practices

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Mortality and morbidity incidences for unweaned dairy calves, management practices that may impair calf health and welfare and producers' attitudes toward calf health were surveyed on 115 farms in Canada (Quebec) and 60 farms in Central Europe (Austria and Germany). Quebec herds had higher juvenile mortality incidence (MED[P75-P25]: 9.6[11.5-6.7]) than Central Europe ones (0[5.4-0]). Juvenile mortality was poorly estimated by producers (Spearman correlation coefficient estimated vs. real data on mortality; Quebec: $r=0.010$, $P>0.1$; Central Europe: $r=0.329$, $P=0.012$). Low levels of mortality did not include low levels of morbidity in the same herds (Spearman correlation coefficient; $r=0.142$, $P>0.1$). Health status was not necessarily associated with management practices generally recommended for health and welfare (Logistic regression, $P>0.1$). Many management practices that may impair calf health and welfare were found in Quebec while only some were found in Central Europe (χ^2 and Wilcoxon statistics, $P<0.1$); these were related to calving management and care of the newborn, colostrum management, calf-dam separation, calf feeding, weaning and calf housing.

Implications: Quebec producers should be encouraged to keep health records in order to help them take good decisions to improve calf management practices and health status.