

Benchmarking dairy heifer management practices and producers' awareness of the Dairy Code: Two recent research projects developed by the University of Calgary.

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Raising healthy replacement heifers is very important for the future of a dairy farm. Successful practices involve raising healthy calves and heifers that contribute to productivity of the farm and provide good welfare for the animals. Practices that fail to provide for all the needs of the animals have already been related in production losses during the adult life of these animals. Recent guidelines published in Canada state the current recommended practices for raising dairy cattle, including the young stock. However, the actual range of practices adopted in dairies throughout Canada is still unknown and little work to date has evaluated the success of various heifer rearing practices. The objective of the heifer management survey is to collect baseline information on calf management practices from dairies in Alberta and identify the best practices related to lowering risk of disease and improving calf performance. The objective of the dairy code awareness project is to assess the effectiveness of Dairy Farmers of Canada's extension efforts in implementing their recently developed code. Currently over 55 of 100 farms have been completed on the heifer survey project in Alberta, and over 240 farms have answered questions on code awareness as part of the comfort project. Data collection will be completed in the summer of 2012. The results from these projects will help identify the best heifer rearing practices associated to higher calf performance and health, and help producers to improve these practices on farm in order to avoid future production losses.