

Marketing of Male Dairy Calves – Findings and Consensus of an Expert Consultation

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A group of experts – including dairy farmers, calf growers, veterinarians, auction operators and regulators – was convened for a focused 2-day discussion of potential health and welfare problems associated with the marketing of male dairy calves. Written notes and audio-recording were used to summarize the information provided, and content analysis was used to develop a consensus statement on concerns, possible solutions, and recommendations. The group noted that calves across all Canadian regions are commonly transported at 3-7 days of age and undergo transport up to 48 hours depending on the location of their dairy farm of origin. Some regions use auctions almost exclusively for marketing, while others rely more on direct sales. Better criteria are needed for calf fitness for transport, maintaining farm biosecurity when calves are collected, reducing the use of antimicrobial therapy in calf production, and improving education for farmers and veterinarians on the importance of neonatal calf care for male dairy calves before transportation. Experts noted that major changes in male dairy calf marketing will be required to comply with new regulations on animal transportation in Canada; collaboration between the industry and regulators will be needed to develop an implementation plan that safeguards animal health and welfare as the transition is made. Take home message: Male dairy calf marketing in Canada can involve transportation of 3-7 day old calves for up to 48 hours. New regulations limit the transport of unweaned calves to 12 hours which may improve animal health and welfare but will require significant procedural changes. A collaborative effort is needed to safeguard calf health and welfare as the dairy and calf-rearing industries transition to comply with the new regulations.