



Bull Calves—simple steps to increase your profit

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There's no way around it, there are a lot of bull calves and the majority of them will be sent to market within the first few days of life. When dealing with bull calves farmers need to be thinking about more than just getting the calf on the trailer and (hopefully) collecting a check. Yes - there may actually be a profit in them, and there is also a public perception to be worried about.

The first step is knowing what buyers are looking for, (size of calves), and what leads to deductions in prices may help you decide how long you should hold on to your bull calves. This can lead to an increase in the price you receive and bull calf profitability.

Statistics
• 9.2 Million Dairy Cows in the U.S
• 4.5 Million bull calves/year.
• 610,000 milk cows calved in NY state resulting in @ 300,000 bull calves

Where your bull calves may end up...

- **Dairy beef:** Price is based off of beef supply, price of feeder calves, price of corn, competition for veal and proximity to dairy feeders.
 - Ideal calves: Healthy calves.
- **Special fed veal:** also referred to as Nature veal or Milk fed. Calf is fed a milk diet for 18 - 22 weeks and raised to 450–500 pounds
 - Ideal calves: **92–120 pounds**, dried and dipped navel, no signs of scours or dehydration, no signs of respiratory problems, good confirmation, fed colostrum.
- **Bob Veal:** Last option for calves not picked up for dairy beef or special fed veal. Calves are boned out and used for sausage, hot dogs, processed meats.

DEDUCTIONS:

- **Mobility** - walks unassisted, standing posture, strong joints, no swelling, firm hooves. Slow moving calves can result in at least a \$50 discount.
- **Health** - Breathing normal, no scours, navel is clean dry and healed. A swollen navel can result in a \$50 discount.
- **Appearance** - Alertness, bright eyes, hair coat is clean, smooth and dry. Wet calves with excessive manure can result in a \$25–50 discount.

MANAGEMENT:

How calves are managed before leaving the farm and then transported has a huge impact on the profit. A few days of TLC and quality care doesn't cost much and has an monetary benefit. Research demonstrates that well managed, quality calves bring more than poorly managed utility calves and the difference gap becomes larger as the market improves.

So what should you as a producer be doing to ensure you get the best price and profit from your bull calves?

- **Calving Stalls** - clean, disinfected & well bedded.
- **Colostrum** - 2-4 qts of high quality colostrum within 2 hours; and 3 times within the first 18 hours.
- **Navel** - dip with 7% tincture of iodine immediately after birth. A swollen navel results in a \$50 discount at market.
- **Environment** - Clean, dry & well bedded.
- **Prevent Drug Residues** - Do not use antibiotics in calves headed to the sale barn. Feed colostrum and milk from non-treated cows. Use non-medicated milk replacers.
- **Marketing** - Do not send "wet" calves, or calves that can not walk unassisted. Wait a minimum of 3 to 5 days after birth so calves are strong, have better condition, a healed navel, and are more mobile.
- **Transportation** - Feed calves within 6 hours of expected delivery. Make sure calves are being transported in a clean, well bedded, covered vehicle.

These management tips are fairly simple and are hopefully some of the same steps you are taking with your heifer calves. Treating your bulls in a similar manner (minus antibiotic usage) as your heifer calves doesn't increase your labor cost and will potentially increase your profit from bull calves sold. Holding on to a bull calf until it reaches 90 to 100 pounds may lead be a very profitable move.

Sending healthy, well managed calves to market not only increases your potential profit but it also reduces the risk of antibiotic residues and improves the public perception of agriculture. Consumers want assurance that animals receive humane treatment and healthy calves are one way to portray that image.

Resources:

- New York Beef Council
- VQA Calf Care Guide

If you would like additional resources on any of the information discussed in this article please do not hesitate to contact me. kmm434@cornell.edu