

Request for Code of Practice Interpretation

Code of Practice: Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle (2017)

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SUMMARY OF REQUEST FOR INTERPRETATION

Concern

The Canadian Veal Association (CVA) is requesting an interpretation of the following requirement in Section [3.2 Young Animal Housing](#): *“Effective December 31, 2020, calves in hutches and outdoor enclosures must not be tethered and calves in hutches must be able to access an area outside the hutch.”*

While the Requirement does not explicitly state that outdoor access must be year-round, it is unclear from the current wording whether calves housed in hutches must have outdoor access during the wet and cold months of mid-November to mid-April.

The provision of outdoor access in areas with heavy rain and/or snowfall creates several management and calf welfare challenges:

- feeding calves during and after heavy snowfalls with hutch access being obstructed with snow causing delay in feedings due to the additional time to clear snow from in front of the hutches in a timely manner to feed the calves.
- keeping the bedding inside the hutches dry especially after heavy rains. Calves continually go in and out of the hutches bringing the mud into the bedding and therefore not allowing for a clean dry area for the calves to lie down.
- Calves that are not protected from the cold have a higher risk of frostbite to the ears, causing undue pain and suffering

These challenges contribute to cold stress for the calves which conflict with other Code Requirements. In sections 2.3, 3.5.2 and 3.6, guidance is provided highlighting the steps that must be implemented to mitigate cold stress.

Clarifying the intent of this Requirement, through a formal interpretation, will help producers and enforcement have a correct and consistent understanding of the relevant Code Requirements.

Question

1. Are calves that are housed in hutches required to have access to the outside during periods where there may be heavy rain and/or snowfall?

RELEVANT CODE SECTIONS CONSIDERED BY THE CTP

Glossary

- **Hutch:** any type of outdoor enclosure that includes some type of overhead cover used to rear 1–2 calves (some hutches are designed to house 4–5 calves). Hutches may be purchased or made.

Section 2.3 Managing Calves Upon Arrival

Relevant Requirements

- Prompt additional care must be provided to calves showing signs of heat or cold stress, illness, or injury on arrival. Signs of illness are provided in Section 6.3; signs of heat and cold stress are provided in Section 3.5.2.

Section 3.2 Young Animal Housing

Relevant Requirements

- Effective December 31, 2020, calves in hutches and outdoor enclosures must not be tethered and calves in hutches must be able to access an area outside the hutch.

Section 3.5.2 Temperature and Relative Humidity

Relevant Requirements

- Protocols to mitigate heat and cold stress must be developed and implemented as part of the herd health plan.
- Steps must be taken to mitigate heat and cold stress in cattle.

Section 3.6 Flooring and Bedding

Relevant Requirements

- A dry, bedded area must be continuously available to calves in hutches, calves up to 16 weeks of age in an existing unheated building, and all cattle reared on solid concrete flooring.

CTP INTERPRETATION

As is reflected in the veal cattle Code, the Code Development Committee agreed that calves must not be tethered; therefore, a fenced off area is necessary to safely contain calves that have access to an area outside the hutch. When drafting section 3.2 Young Animal Housing, the Code Committee did not discuss the management challenges of this fenced off area during heavy snowfall nor the risks to calves outside the hutch during wet and cold months. However, the Code Development Committee was concerned with cold stress in calves (as is reflected in the above Code Requirements focused on mitigating cold stress) and did not intend for calves to be outside during adverse winter weather conditions. The Code does not explicitly require year-round access to an area outside the hutch. Consequently, it would not be considered a violation of the Code if calves did not have access to an area outside the hutch during wet and cold months from mid-November to mid-April.

Rationale

- As is noted in the preamble of Section 3.5.2 Temperature and Relative Humidity, calves are more at risk of cold stress if they are wet, exposed to wind, rest on damp bedding or other cold surfaces, and have insufficient feed intake.
- The Requirement for outdoor access was mainly intended to ensure that calves that could no longer be tethered were not confined inside the hutch in the summer. Aware of research and practical experience that

temperatures inside the hutch can far exceed outdoor temperatures, the Code Committee was concerned about an increased risk of heat stress if calves were confined inside the hutch during the summer and this informed the requirement for outdoor access.

- The Code Technical Panel acknowledges that some producers are in regions where they could not appropriately give calves outdoor access while at the same time fulfilling their other obligations in the Code focused on mitigating cold stress. Unfortunately, the Requirements above set up conflicting expectations for producers in regions that see wet and cold winter conditions.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

- The Requirement in Section 3.2 Young Animal Housing which states that “calves in hutches must be able to access an area outside the hutch” should not be interpreted to mean that calves must have outdoor access during wet and cold winter months. In the interest of appropriate management strategies and calf welfare, outdoor access can be optional during mid-November to mid-April in areas that see high rain and/or snowfall.
- The Code Technical Panel’s interpretation regarding outdoor access from hutches should be referenced by all Code users including those involved in enforcement.
- That the Canadian Veal Association, as well as provincial producer associations, communicate this interpretation to producers and other stakeholders.
- That Code Requirement be changed to ensure clear wording when the veal cattle Code of Practice is next updated. Proposed wording for the next Code update: “Calves in hutches and outdoor enclosures must not be tethered and calves in hutches must be able to access an area outside the hutch with outside access being optional from November 15 to April 15 due to inclement weather.”