

Veal Calves Treated Well Despite Image

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Despite negative images of veal production published by animal activists, most veal calves are healthy and well-treated, according to a Penn State researcher.

"Veal production is the most misunderstood and widely criticized agricultural production method," said Dr. Lowell L. Wilson, professor of animal science. "Our research on more than 1,000 calves over the past two years has shown that growth rates, the condition of the organs, the color and the muscle tone all point to a well-cared for animal."

In a recent study of special-fed or "fancy" veal, where calves were kept on a liquid formula diet for 16 weeks before being marketed, Wilson found that less than 2 percent of the calves died before reaching market. He also found that the average growth rate for the calves ranged from 2.5 pounds to 3.1 pounds per day, depending on the farm where the animals were raised.

"An animal that grows this rapidly is physiologically and metabolically fit. Results from muscle color scores and other characteristics of both rapidly-growing calves and slow-growing calves indicate that faster-growing calves are not necessarily more stressed."

In addition, Wilson's findings debunk animal activists' claims that calves are often anemic

because of the liquid diet they are fed.

"In truly anemic animals the first negative response is lack of growth. This certainly would not be a characteristic veal producers would encourage," Wilson said. "Our research has shown that a count of iron-containing hemoglobin in these calves had levels well above what is considered anemic."

A level of 7.0 grams of hemoglobin per deciliter of blood is considered borderline anemic. During the first 10-week period, the calves in Wilson's study had hemoglobin levels that averaged slightly above 9.2 grams per deciliter. Before being marketed, the average overall level of all the calves was 7.8 grams. The researcher added that when hemoglobin levels drop, producers add iron supplements to the calves' diets.

"These animals are not under nutritional stress, and they are not subject to physical stress from housing conditions."

One of the most controversial practices in veal production systems is the use of individual stalls where calves are tethered. Animal activists claim this practice severely limits calf movement and veal producers should move toward a group housing system.

Wilson explains that in research involving individual stalls versus group housing, individual stalls reduced the spread of disease, calves grew more uniformly, were

cleaner and did not suckle or "chew" one another, and mortality rates were reduced.

In an effort to satisfy questions from animal activists, he has now embarked on a four-year project to determine the health, behavior, performance and effects of calves raised under three different management/nutritional systems. One system will involve the controversial individual stall method and the liquid diet. The second system is a combination of individual stalls and a mixed diet of milk replacer and grain.

The third method — range-raised calves — is a system often suggested by activists. Calves will be raised on marginal-producing dairy cows which act as "foster mothers," pasture and grain. The calves, weaned after four months, are then free to graze on high-quality, perennial grass pastures.

Wilson hopes the study will not only pinpoint the most effective and humane method for veal production, but also lead to the development of a standardized veal grading system.

According to the National Cattlemen's Association, more than 300 million pounds of veal were marketed in 1990. Compared to the beef market, which recorded 22.6 billion pounds, the veal market is a relatively small piece of the cattle industry, and few studies have been done comparing its production methods.

"Although the veal industry is small compared to the beef industry, it is important to many segments of the agricultural community. In fact, the nation's dairy farmers rely heavily on the veal industry to purchase and feed out surplus dairy calves."

The association estimates that in 1991, veal production figures will drop by 15 to 20 percent, mostly because of the expense of raising

calves.

"Veal production costs are up, and consumption is dropping," Wilson said. "We're not sure what the cause of this trend is, but we realize that through research we can improve the systems currently in use and give people a choice on the type of veal they prefer to consume, based on the production method used."

FFA

Twin Valley FFA Wins Big

On February 14 through 16 many top-placing county record books were sent to the state contests. The books were divided into categories such as on-farm and off-farm work experience, rabbits, wildlife, and aquaculture.

Fifteen Twin Valley students had books entered, but 20 medals were awarded to them.

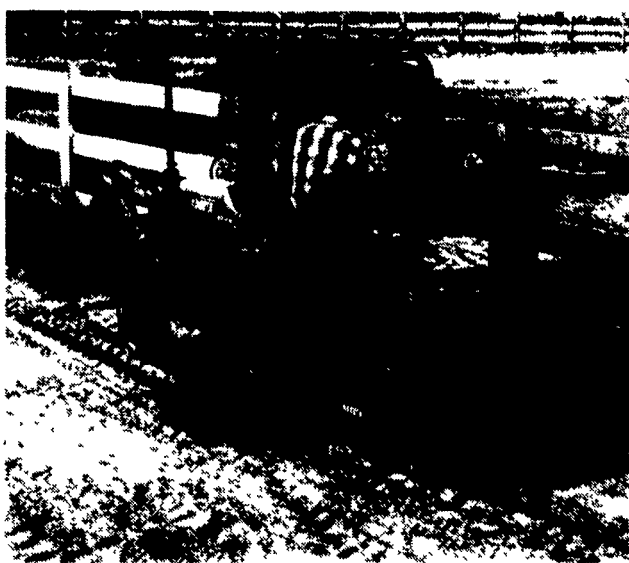
Andy Mast received a gold medal for field corn and grain, and Heather Dougherty for guinea pigs. Ryan Marshall received gold for two projects: beekeeping and non-farm work experience. A gold medal was also won by Ulyssia Drozd for goat breeding. Jason Hess received a gold medal for wildlife and was also named first place winner for the southeast reg-

ion of the Game Commission.

There was also six silver medals won by Twin Valley students. Tracey Putt received one for her beef growing project, and Ray Reinhard for aquaculture. Andy Mast got a silver medal for his dairy herd project, and Brian McGowan for field corn. Ryan Marshall also received two medals in this category for swine finishing and poultry.

There was also many bronze medals awarded to our members. Ben Dodd for his Aquaculture, Brian McGowan for agricultural shop skills, Heather Dougherty for non-farm work experience, Marcie Baker for guinea pigs, and Michelle Powell for poultry. Jason Brooks received two bronze medals, one for home improvement and one for agricultural shop skills. Matt Scott also received a bronze medal and was named the third place winner in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Game Commission region.

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