

Veal Production and Quality

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Veal is defined as the meat derived from carcasses of immature beef less than 20 weeks of age (Kinsman, 1988). Veal may be classified in a variety of ways, including: Bob veal (calves less than 4 weeks of age); veal (calves up to 12 weeks of age); special-fed veal (veal 12 to 16 weeks of age); and pink (southern or grain-fed veal calves up to 20 weeks of age). Approximately 95% of the veal consumed would be classified as grain-fed or special-fed veal. One of the major differences associated with these two different classifications of veal is color. Special-fed veal has a light grayish-pink color, and grain-fed veal is dark grayish-pink to red in color.

The value of veal carcasses is determined by using color in commercial plants. The difference in carcass value may be as much as 30% (between special-fed and pink or grain-fed veal based on color). Under the current marketing system, the demand for special-fed veal is much higher than for the other classifications. Pigment concentration and pH are the

major factors affecting veal color. The most emphasis is directed toward pigment concentration; however, elevated pH may be related to darker color and two-toning of the muscle. Bull et al. (1994) evaluated the nutritional characteristics, color and palatability of special-fed and grain-fed veal calves. They evaluated three muscles (*longissimus*, *semimembranosus*, and *triceps brachii*) from special-fed and grain-fed veal carcasses. Results from this study suggested that special-fed veal had some advantage in raw and cooked color and palatability; however, few differences exist in the nutritional value between grain-fed and special-fed veal.

Evaluation of the various segments of the veal industry suggests that they face several challenges including: Cost of production, product demand, and issues associated with animal welfare. The session also included discussion of current special-fed production practices, particularly those which are of public concern.

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