



## Mitchell Veterinary Services

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#### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULLED DAIRY COW CONDITION AND SALE PRICE

The welfare of culled dairy cows has generated more public attention in the last 2 years. The Journal of Dairy Science just published a research paper entitled "Associations between the general condition of culled dairy cows and selling price at Ontario auction markets". The purpose of this study was to determine the general condition of culled dairy cows sold at Ontario auction markets, to measure the frequency of culled cows in poor condition sold at these auctions, and to determine how this relates to the sale price of the cow.

The most common risk factors for culling are reproductive problems, low milk production, or udder problems. The presence of injury or other disease, however, can both directly and indirectly increase the risk of culling for dairy cows. There is a positive association between lameness and reproductive problems, mastitis and reduced milk production.

The number of culled dairy cows examined was 4,460 from 3 different auction barns over a 4 month period. Each individual cow had her body condition score, hock injury score, gait score and whether her tail was docked evaluated as she walked into the sale ring. Body Weight, breed and sale price were recorded. ProAction Guidelines were used to measure hock scores and lameness scores. This study only looked at cows sold through the sale ring. Animals that are unable to cope with the stress of transport due to disease, injury, or any other factors which may affect their welfare, should not be transported. Cows rejected for health and welfare reasons, and cows sold directly to the abattoir were not a part of this study.

Results showed that 27.2% of culled cows scored had unacceptable hock injuries, 40.5% had a body condition score (BCS) < 2, 72.7% had an abnormal gait (lameness) and 12.5% had docked tails. Cows with a BCS <2 sold for \$0.20 less/kg compared with those with a BCS >2, which equated an overall loss of \$117 per cow. Cows with an abnormal gait sold for \$0.05 less per kg compared with culled cows with a normal gait, which equated to an overall average loss of \$32.45 per cow. There was no difference in the sale price depending on hock injury score or the presence or absence of a full tail.

The main issues identified in this study were the high prevalence of low body condition and abnormal gait, indicating the welfare of these cows may be at risk. Despite regulations that describe when an animal can and cannot be transported, results from this study show that culled cows are sold at auction markets in conditions which do not meet industry standards and Ontario Transport Regulations. Cows with low BCS and abnormal gait sold for a lower price compared to cows in good condition, which results in less potential profit for the producer. If you would like more information on lameness assessment and BCS of cows you are considering to cull, please discuss it with us.

Rick, Phil, Rachel