

# Standardizing 4-H show health rules

Cattle vets and 4-H Ontario hope to bring clarity and consistency with mandatory animal requirements for 4-H shows

VETERINARIANS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED many times in determining whether a particular animal has been infected/affected by a particular disease entity at a 4-H or other cattle show, and then handed the responsibility of deciding whether the animal and the exhibitor should be expelled from the show or not,

based on the presence or absence of a disease.

Show committees have too often ignored or avoided the issue of standardized mandatory health requirements for show cattle. When health requirements are not equivalent or the rules are not applied consistently within jurisdictions or between jurisdictions, exhibitors and 4-H leaders become confused and resentful when disqualifications occur.

The biggest losers are the exhibitors - the 4-Hers - our aspiring dairy and beef farmers of the future.

The executive of the Ontario Association of Bovine Practitioners (OABP) have come to the conclusion that there must be a better, more proactive method of dealing with these situations that is fairer to all parties. 4-H Ontario has welcomed the collaboration on the development of a program to educate and improve the knowledge and showmanship of their members and leaders.

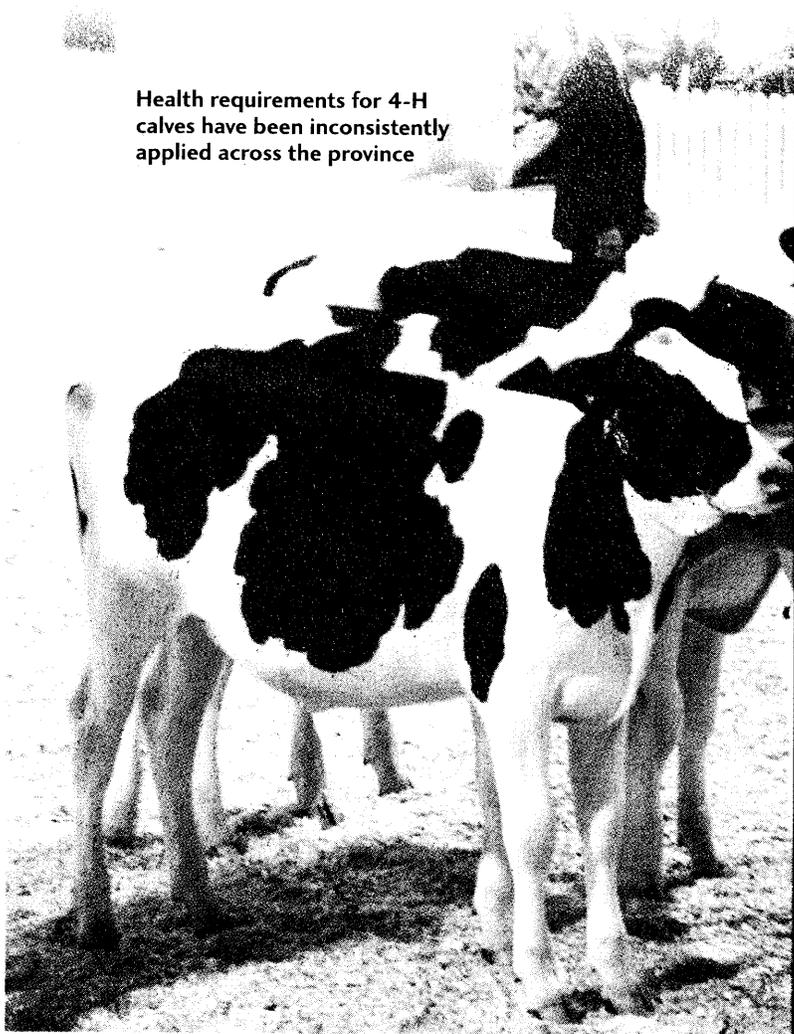
Recently, 4-H Ontario invited stakeholders and interested parties to a meeting to discuss this issue. The goal of the collaborative working group is to establish a set of health guidelines for 4H calves and 4-H shows in Ontario. The group has the mandate to determine the following:

- Should there be mandatory province-wide health requirements for ALL 4-H calves at ALL shows?
- If so, what should the health standards be?
- Finally, who will enforce and police these standards?

The OABP executive has provided its initial perspective on these important questions in the information that follows.

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Health requirements for 4-H calves have been inconsistently applied across the province



## SHOULD THERE BE PROVINCE-WIDE 4-H CALF HEALTH STANDARDS?

We believe that the answer to this question should be "Yes". If province-wide calf health standards were implemented, it would be easy to educate the 4-H organization, local 4-H leaders, 4-Hers and their parents on the standards, and to explain why particular standards are necessary and important.

The standards would avoid the confusion that presently exists, wherein a particular calf may be eligible to be exhibited at the county level in spite of the presence of a contagious disease, be one of the best at the county level and therefore eligible for the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair (RAWF), but rejected at the RAWF because it failed the health exam at the RAWF. Bovine veterinarians would welcome being proactively involved in the education process at the provincial and county level. Discussing health standards annually at the calf club level, early in the 4-H year would be effective.

## WHAT SHOULD THE HEALTH STANDARDS BE?

The OABP executive formed a subcommittee to discuss this issue. The consensus of the subcommittee was that the 4-H calves should be free of ANY evidence of communicable diseases including and especially ringworm and warts. Additionally, they should be appropriately vaccinated against the common contagious viral diseases prior to a show(s). It should also be understood that the calf must otherwise be healthy: bright and alert, normal appetite and temperature, and free of such medical conditions as respiratory disease or diarrhea.

If the calf is under treatment for any condition at the time of the show, it

must be accompanied by documentation from the herd veterinarian indicating the identity of the animal, and the treatment it is undergoing.

Ringworm and warts are both highly contagious diseases. Ringworm is also a zoonotic disease, which means it can be spread from cattle to humans. It is caused by a fungus that invades hair, hair follicles and the surrounding skin

tissue. The body mounts an immune response to the fungus, but it can take months before the fungus is eliminated and the skin lesions fully healed. Immunity is typically short-lived and incomplete after infection.

Severe infections are typically confined to debilitated or immune suppressed animals. Immune suppression is caused by such things as poor

nutrition, parasitism and other disease states (pneumonia, scours).

Spread occurs from direct contact or by contaminated fomites such as grooming tools, clipper blades, or tack. As a result, cattle shows can contribute significantly to the spread of the disease.

Warts are caused by a virus. Spread occurs by direct contact, fomites as per ringworm, and also possibly by insects. Warts typically appear two months after exposure to the virus and may last over a year. Immunity usually develops three to four weeks after initial infection, but infection occasionally recurs, probably due to loss of immunity. Treatment is often not undertaken because the infection is relatively short-lived and because many treatments are of questionable effectiveness.

Surgical excision is the most common therapy employed, but care

must be taken to wait until the warts stop growing in size or are starting to regress. Premature excision appears to stimulate growth of warts and encourage recurrence of the warts. Affected animals should be isolated, but because of the long incubation period, unaffected animals are often already exposed by the time initial infection is apparent.

There presently are no commercial vaccines available for warts or ringworm. Therefore, the primary focus of prevention is avoidance of contact with affected cattle. The purchase of infected cattle and the co-mingling of cattle at shows, sales, and in communal calf, heifer or dry cow raising facilities are the primary methods that these diseases are introduced to farms.

On some farms, ringworm or warts are endemic on the farm, often in a particular age of cattle. On these

farms, 4-H calves should be housed in separate facilities from their herd mates of a similar age. Ideally (providing that the pre-weaned calves are not affected by ringworm or warts), the show calves should be housed separately from their herd mates from weaning through the entire duration of the show season.

For home herd biosecurity reasons, they should remain segregated (quarantined) from the resident herd for several months after the last show to reduce the risk that they will introduce a contagious disease to the resident herd. This means, at a minimum, not in physical contact (including through a gate) and not sharing any common feeding or water access.

All 4-H calves should be vaccinated for the common highly contagious viral diseases including IBR (Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis), BVD (Bovine Viral Diarrhea), BRSV (Bovine Respiratory Syncytial Virus), and PI-3 (Parainfluenza Virus 3). This will protect the health of the show calf but also the home herd when the calf returns. This can be accomplished with multiple doses of a killed vaccine or a live virus vaccine following the manufacturer's and/or herd veterinarian's instructions regarding the age of the calf at the time of vaccination, number of doses required, and route of administration.

Existing vaccines are highly effective in the prevention of these diseases. Calves must have completed the recommended vaccination program at least two weeks prior to the first show they are to participate in. Therefore, careful planning is the key to the success of this health standard.

### **WHO SHOULD ENFORCE THE HEALTH STANDARDS?**

Currently, veterinarians are primarily consulted to provide their

expertise at the time of the show. These situations can be highly volatile and stressful for all involved. A veterinarian can become the target of criticism if he/she disqualifies the calf in question. At the county level, the veterinarian could be in a conflict of interest if the calf in question were a client's calf. We suggest that all parties are losers in these situations, and that these situations should be avoided at all cost.

Responsibility for the enforcement of the health standards should be shared among the provincial 4-H organization, the calf club leaders, calf owners, the parents of 4-H members and the 4-H members themselves.

4-H and the club leaders need to clearly communicate what the health requirements are, why they are important, and what the consequences of not complying with the health standards will be.

Bovine veterinarians would welcome the opportunity of providing education for the members of the 4H calf clubs and their leaders. This can be best accomplished by a veterinarian attending a calf club meeting early in the 4-H year, to explain and discuss the health requirements with 4-H Club leaders, parents, owners and 4-H members. The health standards should be reinforced throughout the year by the club leaders.

In preparation for all 4-H shows, the OABP executive recommends that the parents of 4-H members and/or the owners of the calves, examine their calves at their respective farms in the week prior to the each 4-H show, to ensure that the 4-H calves to be exhibited are completely free of ringworm, warts, and other communicable diseases, and have been vaccinated appropriately.

After examining the calf, if they are unsure if the calf is eligible to be

shown, they should contact the 4-H leader, who should then examine the calf to make the final determination, prior to show day. If the leader requires further assistance to make that determination, he/she should feel free to consult the herd veterinarian.

The OABP executive recommends a "completely free" policy where debates on whether the disease is still "alive", "active" and "contagious" are avoided. There must be absolutely no visible sign of ringworm, warts or other communicable disease on the calves. Finally, a 4-H Calf Passport program could be reintroduced in Ontario to document the exhibitor's compliance with the health standards for the full show season.

Presently, in Ontario health requirements for 4-H calves for eligibility to attend the county, regional, provincial and national shows are

either poorly explained and/or poorly and inconsistently enforced.

4-H Ontario believes strongly in holding shows that highlight healthy animals. Research is currently underway and discussions among the various stakeholders have begun, for the development of new learning tools and recommendations for Club activities and shows.

As always, 4-H Ontario's focus is on a positive learning experience of members. The OABP, including both executive and the member veterinarians, welcome the opportunity to assist in the development of show calf health standards and an accompanying educational program.

Both the OABP executive and 4-H Ontario hope that this joint educational initiative leads to better education about health improvement programs for 4-H participants and healthier 4-H show calves. ⑩