

## **Carcass Condemnations in Market Cattle**

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The recently completed 1999 National Market Cow and Bull Beef Quality Audit (NMCBBQA) carries important messages for dairy producers. Slaughter cattle quality problems occur frequently in dairy cattle. Most of these problems can be managed to enhance the value, and thus the producer profit, from animals that leave the dairy for slaughter. In this article we will consider the causes of carcass condemnations in order to shed light on the possible avenues to increase value of market cattle.

Culling cows and bulls is a natural part of dairy herd management. Each year, 29-33% of the nation's dairy herd numbers are culled. The 1999 Federally Inspected Slaughter (projected) of market cows was 5,601,000, 50% of which were dairy cows. While these cows are culled for a variety of production related reasons, the sale of dairy cows accounts for approximately 4% of the average dairy producer's annual income.

Given this potential source of income, it is important that producers understand and realize the causes of carcass condemnation. In the NMCBBQA-1999 it was determined that 0.12% of market cows and bulls (beef and dairy combined) were condemned antemortem (before harvest, condemned in the holding pens), while 1.1% of cows and bulls were condemned postmortem (following harvest, condemned on the harvest floor).

Epithelioma, more commonly known as cancer eye in live animals, is any tumor derived of epithelial origin. Inflammation of the eye, pus around the eye, or abnormal tissue growth on the eyeball or eyelids are characteristic signs of cancer eye. The condition can be avoided by promptly treating the eyes of any bull or cull cattle that look abnormal.

Lymphosarcoma, cancerous growth of lymphoid tissue and lymph glands, is seen as progressively enlarging lymph nodes. Bovine Leukemia Virus (BLV) infection is the cause of the disease, and leads to the formation of the tumors. Although swollen lymph nodes can typically be seen or felt under the skin, often the internal tissues are even more significantly affected. Cattle should be pre-screened and producers should select for cattle that are BLV negative.

Septicemia and pyemia are terms that describe the circulation of toxins or pus in the blood. Pyemia is an abnormal increase of white cells in the blood, and can result from severe pneumonia, metritis (uterine infection) or mastitis. Septicemia occurs when bacteria or their by-products circulate in the blood. The cows will be very sick showing fever or chills, sweating, and loss of appetite.

Pneumonia is a common illness in cattle. It occurs with viral or bacterial infection in the lungs and is recognized by a fever, nasal discharge, possibly coughing or shortness of breathe. Once pneumonia is diagnosed, cattle should be treated appropriately. Special attention should go to the withdrawal period of the pharmaceutical product used prior to shipment of the cow or bull from the production unit.

Bruising over large portions of the body or even the entire carcass was the cause of 3.3% of cow carcasses condemned in 1999. Tremendous losses in carcass value also result from trimming to remove bruised tissue. In the 1999 NMCBBQA only 11.8% of cows were free of bruising. The extent of bruising was graded, and 77.2% of cows had minor bruises, 41.7% had medium, 21.6% had major, and 2.4% were extremely bruised. The industry can expect to lose approximately 17 million pounds of trim as a direct result of bruising. Producers can minimize this loss by handling and transporting cattle carefully.

Based on the data from the NMCBBQA - 1999, approximately 33,000 dairy cows and dairy cow carcasses, were condemned in 1999. Given a carcass value of \$363 per carcass, the dairy industry lost nearly \$12 million due to cattle and/or carcass condemnations in 1999, a value that can be reduced with proper management and marketing of cull cows and bulls.

#### Leading Reasons for Carcass Condemnation in 1999

- epithelioma
- lymphosarcoma
- septicemia
- pyemia
- pneumonia
- bruises/injuries
- carcinoma
- peritonitis
- pericarditis
- nephritis