

To Ship Or Not To Ship? Food for Thought About Cattle Transport

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Everyone knows that dairy farmers are very proud of the fact that they produce and market high quality, nutritious, and safe milk products. But some might be surprised to learn that these same farmers are equally as proud to produce high quality, nutritious, and safe beef products! Once a cow's career as a milking animal has come to an end, she may go on to become a beef cow. Dairies are also a source of calves that can be raised for veal or other beef products. However, shipping for meat is not the only reason an animal might leave the farm - she could be transported from the heifer barn to the dairy barn up the road, to the sale barn for purchase as a dairy cow, or to a show. When animals leave a farm, it is important to consider how they are going to be transported to their final destination. Each animal should be evaluated prior to being transported to ensure that it is "fit for transport." To assist farmers in the decision making process, the Dairy Farmers of Canada developed the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle which includes a section about transportation. In this section the pre-transport decision making process is reviewed. Animals should never be transported unless you are sure they are healthy enough to handle the entire journey - keep in mind that this could mean resale at multiple auction yards before arrival at a slaughter plant. It is always best to assume the longest trip possible for transit time. An animal is deemed to be "compromised" or "unfit for transport" if it has a reduced capacity to handle the stress of transport, if it is injured, diseased, weak, very lame, very old or very young. If you are unsure if an animal would be considered unfit, consult your veterinarian. Occasionally, special circumstances can be made to allow animals to be shipped direct to slaughter, so long as minimal transit times and special care is given during transport, such as travel in a separate compartment with ample bedding.

Animals that have very recently given birth or may calve during transport, or those that are extremely thin or lame, must not be transported. Efforts should be made to wait until they have recovered from calving or return these animals to good health before shipping. If this is not possible, and the animal would endure undue suffering, humane euthanasia should be performed.

While truck drivers have the right and responsibility to refuse to transport animals that are unfit, it is ultimately the responsibility of the producer to determine if an animal is able to be transported.

Guidelines can also be found about proper identification (CCIA tag), loading and unloading techniques, proper vehicle footing, stocking densities and acceptable timelines for animals with respect to access to feed, water and milking.

How can you be successful with transportation of dairy cattle?

- Refer to the Should this animal be loaded? - Guidelines for Transporting Cattle flow chart. This chart is extremely useful and includes information about lameness classification.
- Assess animals regularly and make decisions early - don't wait until it is too late! With proper treatment, many animals can be addressed and or treated prior to being culled.
- Investigate your options and find out if there is a local abattoir that you can send animals direct to slaughter.
- Consult with your herd veterinarian about cull animals - vets can help you with the decision making process.

LINK: <http://www.farmfoodcare.org/pdfs/animal-resources/2010-national-cattle-sheep-goats.pdf>