



Fit for travel? It's in the book

New handbook should eliminate penside battles between shippers, truckers

By James Menzies

CALGARY, Alta. – Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC) has published a handy resource for cattle haulers that clearly defines what conditions makes beef cattle unfit for transport.

The booklet, entitled “Humane Handling of Beef Cattle – Standards for the Care of Unfit Animals” is available now through the association. It’s a resource that AFAC hopes every cattle hauler will keep handy to help resolve disputes between shippers and truckers regarding whether or not it’s okay to transport an unhealthy animal.

Tim O’Byrne, owner of Calico Beef Consulting and a humane transportation expert, introduced the booklet at the recent Livestock Trucking Workshop in Calgary, Alta.

The event was part of the Animal Transportation Association’s annual international conference.

O’Byrne said both the shipper and the trucker are responsible for determining whether an ani-

mal is fit for transport.

Now, for the first time, the guidelines have been put to paper as a pocket-sized handbook in an effort to offer a solution to the age-old situation where a producer insists an animal is shipped despite the reluctance of the truck driver.

The Health of Animals Act was adjusted in 1990 to read “whoever loads or *causes to be loaded*” may be held accountable in a case where an unfit animal is loaded onto the truck.

“That change is very important for us guys who are moving these critters around,” O’Byrne said.

Still, despite the simple change of wording which made shippers more accountable, in the past there was no clear way to determine what conditions made an animal unfit for transport – it remained at the discretion of the driver and the producer.

“The need for a decision tree

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was identified in the 1990s,” O’Byrne said. “The shippers’ natural tendency is to ship it. Truckers need to challenge the shipper and that’s a tough one. It puts the trucker in a real uncomfortable position and that’s not right.”

He points out the dispute generally occurs at the shipper’s facility and it’s not always possible to get a professional opinion on the spot.

Enter the guidelines – which clearly outline the most common conditions that affect beef cattle. The book also lists management options and the regulations which could come into play if the animal is loaded.

“The book covers the kinds of things you’re going to see at the chutes and it levels out the playing field,” said O’Byrne. “It defines the boundaries of what’s acceptable.”

Armed with the new guidelines,

it will now be up to truckers to help educate shippers about what can and can’t go on the truck, O’Byrne admits.

“We have to get to producers and educate them that euthanizing at the farm is an option rather than taking it down and trying to get 10 cents on the dollar for it,” he added.

Although the new guidelines should diffuse most disagreements between shippers and livestock haulers, it’s inevitable there will still be the odd disagreement.

O’Byrne said in that case truckers should load the animal under protest by making special provisions (such as increased bedding and a separate compartment) for the animal and have the shipper sign the manifest indicating the animal was loaded against the driver’s wishes.

“We’ve had some guys try that and the shipper wouldn’t sign it,” O’Byrne said. “He said ‘Forget it’ and left the animal there. It’s not the best way to do it but sometimes it’s the only option we have.”

To obtain a copy of the guidelines, call AFAC at (403) 932-8050. □

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