

RECONCILING RECOMMENDED PRACTICES WITH REALITY

Stocking Density and Livestock Transport

Transporting livestock is a complicated process. Stocking density is one of a multitude of factors that impact upon an animal's experience during transport.

AFAC has completed two livestock transportation reports (1994 & 2002), highlighting industry achievements and issues. In each report stocking density has been raised. Both reports include input from producers, handlers, transporters, veterinarians, receivers, regulators and animal welfare representatives.

Stocking density concerns are multi-faceted:

- Codes of practice that do not match industry norms;
- Lack of North American based science to determine what the standards should be;
- Loading as per legal axle weight limits versus the overcrowding of livestock;
- Inadequate education and enforcement.



AFAC's 1994 transportation report recommended:

“Establish specifications that are based on research and current industry best practices. Specifically: Minimum and maximum space requirements during transit, for all species of all ages and physiological needs...”

Martin Appelt, CFIA Humane Transportation Specialist, believes the codes of practice vary in their appropriateness depending upon the species. However, when comparing them to international standards, “the codes could be accused of being too lenient.” The Canadian codes, he noted, reflect maximum loading densities, not optimal.

AFAC's 2002 transportation report, noted that the current *Recommended Loading Density Chart for Beef Cattle* might be in need of amendment.

In the case of the 1991 Beef Code, recommended stocking densities were derived from a combination of expert opinion and non-North American research. North American studies to evaluate appropriate stocking densities in cattle are lacking.

Dr. Terry Whiting, MB Veterinary Services Branch, did a comparison of eight minimum space allowance standards for cattle transport¹. He found that the Canadian transport code is consistent with standards established elsewhere in the world. However, there is a “need for ongoing updating of codes of practice.” In addition, “further research into space allowance needs of cattle in transit by road is required.”

Aart Okkema, AFAC Chair, says, “There is a need for transportation research, if for nothing else but to validate the current best management practices in our industry. We need to be able to support our actions and practices with good science.”

Tim O'Byrne livestock transportation specialist, says, “The codes are fairly reasonable in some ways. It's just that the math does not work. Every cattle truck on the road today will likely be in violation of the Health of Animals Act if the code is used by CFIA to determine how many cattle can be loaded into a compartment.” He adds, “99% of our youthful cattle [under 30 months] are hauled fantastically. I've seen thousands of loads move humanely without a problem.”

Dr. Paul Bennis, CFIA veterinarian, says, “The stocking density issue has to be re-visited. However, overloading [over legal axle weight limits] and overcrowding does sometimes occur, and will continue unless dealt with in a responsible manner.” Overcrowding may lead to excessive bruising, downers and heat exhaustion in cattle. Dr. Bennis notes, “If you load fat cattle legally [i.e., legal axle weight limits] you are not likely to overcrowd.”

“All experienced cattle truckers do know about overloading and overcrowding, but they are sometimes goaded or forced to overload by producers and buyers,” says Dr. Bennis.

“We have to protect that sector of our industry [truckers],” says Tim O'Byrne. “We depend upon them a great deal. We need to make it less stressful for the trucker, as well as the animal.” ■

¹Can Vet J. 2000 Nov;41(11):855-60

AFAC is launching its *Quality Livestock Transport* certification training program, Summer 2005 and is holding an industry/CFIA/researcher meeting to help coordinate a plan to address research needs.