

# Transportation Fitness: Focus on Emaciation



## A Fact Sheet for the Canadian Cattle Industry

The following fact sheet was created using recommendations from the Compromised Cattle Benchmarking Project to highlight conditions of importance that should be brought to the cattle industry's attention when transporting cattle. The goal of AFAC's Compromised Cattle Benchmarking Project was to observe cattle arriving at auction markets and abattoirs throughout Alberta and catalogue the incidence and type of conditions observed upon arrival.

### **Key Points about Transport Decisions:**

When deciding if an animal can be transported, it is important to consider how the animal will withstand loading, transit, and unloading.

If an animal is being shipped to an auction market, the animal needs to be fit enough to withstand sale conditions and at least one subsequent trip. This may involve:

- Moving through handling systems
- A delay between sale date and slaughter
- Hauls of a long duration
- Mixing animals

These normal parts of transport can be risk factors for emaciated animals and can lead to undue suffering or injuries during transport depending on the animal's condition.

An **emaciated** (i.e. extremely thin) animal is one that has a body condition score (BCS) of 1.

In beef cattle this can be identified as having:

- Muscle atrophy and no detectable fat
- No fat around the hooks, pins, and tail head
- Individual vertebrae along the topline well defined
- Short ribs visually prominent and sharp to the touch
- All skeletal structures are visible

In dairy cattle emaciation is when:

- The short ribs project sharply, with a shelf-like appearance
- Individual vertebrae of the topline are prominent
- Hook and pin bones are sharp to the touch
- The area around the tail head is sunken and hollow
- Ligaments connecting pin bones to spine are sharply defined
- The vulva is prominent

### **Why does emaciation and weakness make cattle unfit for transport?**

An animal that is weak and emaciated is considered unfit for transport because:

- Weakness associated with emaciation (BCS = 1) increases an animal's risk of becoming non-ambulatory during transport, loading or unloading
- Emaciated animals (BCS = 1) have no body reserves left to cope with stress and feed/water withdrawal

**During the Compromised Cattle Benchmarking Project, emaciation and weakness was one of the most frequently observed unfit conditions arriving to auction markets.**

The observations from the Compromised Cattle Benchmarking Project demonstrate that there is still room for improvement in identifying and appropriately disposing of certain compromised and unfit conditions.

**Unfit animals (emaciated (BCS = 1) and weak) should not be loaded or transported EXCEPT for veterinary care or diagnosis, on the advice of a veterinarian.**

**The importance of considering how conditions progress:**

During the Cattle Benchmarking Project, instances of mature cattle purchased at auction being transported to another market for resale were observed on a regular basis. Therefore:

- It is important to consider that an animal may be transported a long distance to reach its destination depending on the purchaser
- It is important to consider that animals may not be destined directly for slaughter and may need to withstand multiple loading/unloading, mixing and transport events.
- The increased time before slaughter of cull animals could also allow conditions to worsen over time.

These observations stress the importance of promptly identifying and managing animals that are losing condition.

**An animal that appears strong enough to withstand initial transport may be weaker or more fatigued on unloading, after multiple transport events, time spent standing on hard ground, feed or water withdrawal, or delayed time to slaughter.**

**It is also important to recognize when a condition may progress over time** (e.g. increasing weakness and fatigue) and look much different if time to slaughter is delayed due to resale, or unforeseen events such as weather, plant shutdown, or backlog.

It is important to have a good relationship and open communication about transportation fitness with your local abattoir(s), auction market(s), assembly yard(s), and transporter(s).

This project was funded through the Assurance Systems stream of the AgriMarketing program under Growing Forward 2, a federal-provincial- territorial initiative. The project was also supported by Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Milk and Alberta Cattle Feeders Association.



**References:**

1. CFIA Compromised Animal Policy, available at <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/animals/terrestrial-animals/humane-transport/compromised-animals-policy/eng/1360016317589/1360016435110>
2. Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle, NFACC, available at <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle>
3. Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle, NFACC, available at <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/dairy-cattle>

✉ High River PO Box 5201  
#5 112 Centre Street  
High River, AB T1V 1M4

☎ 403-652-5111  
🌐 www.afac.ab.ca

📍 Alberta Farm Animal Care  
🐾 @AbFarmAnimal



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