

Transportation Fitness: Focus on Heavy Lactation



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.

During the Compromised Cattle Benchmarking Project, arriving at auction markets in heavy lactation was identified as the primary concern for dairy cows

Lactating cattle should be dried off. If for some reason the animal cannot be dried off (e.g. teat laceration), then it should be transported directly to an abattoir.

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 animals in heavy lactation and can lead to undue suffering or injuries during transport depending on the animal's condition.

Why does heavy lactation limit where an animal can be transported?

Cattle are considered compromised if they are in heavy lactation because:

- They require milking every 12 hours or they will become unfit for transport
- When left un-milked, an engorged and pendulous udder is more likely to be injured
- When left un-milked, milk may drip from the teats – these open milk ducts could increase the risk of mastitis development

When being transported, compromised animals must be transported with special provisions, directly to the nearest suitable place to receive care, treatment, or be humanely slaughtered or euthanized. **THESE ANIMALS SHOULD NOT BE TRANSPORTED TO AN AUCTION OR ASSEMBLY YARD.** Alternatively, the animal could be dried off and transported at a later date.

Unfit animals 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 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

A condition that appears minor before initial transport may still increase the animal’s risk for injury or suffering after multiple transport events or delayed time to slaughter.

It is also important to recognize when a condition may progress over time (e.g. mastitis) and be much more severe 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).

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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>

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