

Humane Marketing and Transportation of Cull Dairy Cows

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▪ Take Home Messages

- There are federal laws governing the transportation of animals.
- Cull dairy cows make up a significant number of cows which end up injured, down or dead during transportation to slaughter.
- Cull dairy cows have characteristics which can make them difficult to humanely market.
- Dairy producers should be making marketing decisions which will ensure humane salvage of their animals.
- Compromised dairy cows should not be marketed through auction markets.

▪ Introduction

Part of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's mandate is to ensure compliance with the federal Health of Animals Act and Regulations. Part X11 of these regulations deal with the Humane Transportation of Animals and apply to all animals being loaded, transported, and unloaded within Canada. To promote compliance of this legislation, CFIA is involved in a variety of activities. These include monitoring of transportation at federal slaughter plants and at auction markets, providing educational material, interacting with livestock commodity groups, and pursuing prosecution of offenders when required.

Through conducting transportation inspections, CFIA has found that cull dairy cows can be in a compromised physical state which makes humane marketing and transportation challenging. Unless particular care is taken with these animals, problems such as weakness, hypothermia, recumbency, and death can result. Dairy producers have the responsibility of ensuring humane salvage

for their animals and should utilize timely culling and target marketing to facilitate this.

▪ **Humane Transportation Regulations**

Part X11 of the federal Health of Animals Regulations contain the "Musts" and "Must Nots" for transporting animals into, out of, and within Canada. Relevant sections include:

- 138 - Sick, Pregnant, and Unfit animals
- 139 - Loading and Unloading Equipment
- 140 - Prohibition of Overcrowding
- 141 - Segregation
- 143 - Protection of Animals from Injury or Sickness
- 148 - Time in Transit; feed, water, and rest

A 1997 amendment to these regulations has put more responsibility on the person "*causing the animals to be loaded and transported*" rather than having the entire onus for compliance placed on the transporter, or an employee following orders. This change re-emphasizes the responsibility that producers have to ensure their animals are transported in compliance with the legislation. The Health of Animals Regulations can be viewed on the Internet on the CFIA web site (www.cfia-acia.agr.ca) or by contacting any CFIA District Office. Each province has its own legislation which may or may not encompass the humane transportation of animals. The respective provincial agriculture departments should have information available on their legislation.

▪ **Welfare and the Dairy Industry**

The dairy industry, like any other, is subject to public scrutiny. There are characteristics of both the industry and our western society which can lead to increased public awareness and interest in the activities surrounding milk production.

A trend toward the urbanization of our population has, and will continue to create, distancing between consumers and the farming culture. This distancing can result in a lack of understanding of husbandry and production practices and may cause consumers to be more susceptible to believing criticism of the industry.

An additional factor of the dairy industry which producers should be aware of is the intimate relationship the public has with milk and milk products. Incorporated in this is the pastoral or romantic perception of the dairy cow, which is held by many. A stereotypical view of the dairy cow includes a placid,

gentle animal with big soft eyes who grazes and gives up her milk contentedly to her care- giving farmer. A consumer with this idealistic image in mind would perhaps be strongly impacted by bad press or evidence of inhumane treatment of dairy cows. Basically, dairy cows tend to appeal to the emotional side of people more than some other livestock.

A third consideration is the change in how our society views welfare issues. Like smoking, the way in which a farmer treated his livestock **used to be** a personal issue. We have seen over the past years how smoking has moved from a personal ethic to a societal ethic. Similarly, animal welfare issues are becoming a societal ethic in that the way animals are treated is not just a farmer's personal business but more of a social concern.

▪ **The Cull Dairy Cow**

Cull dairy cows frequently are in a compromised physical state, which affects their ability to cope with the stresses caused by marketing and transportation. They may have only marginal energy reserves, which can contribute to weakness, if they receive inadequate food intake between the farm and their final destination. Similarly, if they are exposed to temperatures/environments, which are colder than what they have been acclimatized to, they have a reduced ability to generate heat and maintain their body temperatures. Exposed udders (which may be enlarged due to mastitis or ligament breakdown) and inadequate winter hair growth can contribute to frostbite at a market or during transportation. These potential impairments, especially when compounded with a primary health problem, which may have caused culling, predispose these animals to injury, fatigue, weakness, hypothermia, recumbency and/or death before slaughter occurs. The practice of assembling slaughter loads over a period of time and long distance transportation to slaughter are examples of practices which contribute to the stresses placed on some of these cows.

▪ **Best Practices Dairy Producers should Follow**

It is in the producers' and industry's best interest when timely and responsible decisions are made concerning the marketing of cull dairy cows.

The first step in this process is for all producers to understand and appreciate both the physical condition their animal is in and the stresses the animal will likely be subjected to when marketed.

Secondly, the producer should obtain information¹ on physical conditions which will either result in an animal being condemned at slaughter **or** prevent the animal from being loaded and/or transported humanely. Animals with condemnable conditions should be euthanized on the farm. Animals which are salvageable, but cannot be humanely loaded and/or transported, should be butchered on farm using the services of a mobile butcher. If the cow is inspected before and after slaughter and is butchered by a licensed butcher, the meat may be eligible for retail sale, depending on the respective provincial meat inspection legislation. Information on these conditions can be obtained through provincial agriculture departments, CFIA district offices, and by working with the herd veterinarian.

Once it can be determined that an animal can be loaded and transported humanely the producer must assess whether the cow should be direct-delivered to slaughter or whether it is fit enough to withstand the potential rigors of the marketing process. Producers must realize that once a cow is delivered to an auction market, there are few checks in place to ensure an animal is fed, watered, sheltered, milked, transported, and delivered to slaughter all in a humane manner. Cull cows at markets can enter into a 'cull cow chain' which may involve multiple owners, multiple transportation, many days, and even varied weather conditions before delivery to slaughter. In this scenario, the buck, like the cow, is easy to pass on to someone else. Unfortunately, if there is a problem with an animal somewhere along this 'chain', the animal's well being can be overlooked in favour of convenience and saving money. There tends not to be a personal interest or relationship with the animals during the marketing process and it can take extra time, effort, and expense to intervene if an animal has special requirements. Therefore, only healthy, non-compromised cull dairy cows should enter the market system. In order to facilitate humane handling and transportation of their animals, producers should deliver cull cows with physical impairments directly to slaughter. In areas where there is not readily accessible slaughter services, dairy producers should work together to assemble salvageable cull animals and arrange for direct trucking to the nearest slaughter facility.

▪ **Summary**

The dairy industry has a reputation of being progressive, organized, and successful. With educated producers, intelligent marketing, and a desirable product, the industry enjoys a favourable position with a largely urban consumer base. This same consumer group, however, can be swayed by perceived negative components of the industry. One significant challenge which the dairy industry must acknowledge and address is the marketing of its

¹ Information on condemnable conditions and on conditions which prevent an animal from being loaded/transported humanely are available from CFIA District Offices and from producers' veterinarians.

cull animals. Cull cows can be in a tenuous state with respect to their ability to maintain their strength and their body temperature. This can be compounded by whatever health problem for which they are being culled.

In order to complete their responsibility to their animals and maintain the industry's reputation, dairy producers should take active steps to ensure their cull animals are salvaged in a humane and timely manner.

