

Transporting Cattle

Our topics for this week are:

- **Preparing cattle for transport**
- **Loading cattle in trailers**
- **Federal requirements when transporting cattle**

Because of its relative novelty to the cattle, it is more difficult loading well-handled cattle into a truck or trailer than into an alleyway and squeeze chute. As with other aspects of cattle handling, allowing extra time to accomplish the loading with minimum stress is desirable. Stress causes muscle to become dark and tough. If the cattle are going to be marked “dark cutters”, they are less valuable. Cattle that are stressed defecate more often, drink less, and lose weight which also makes them less valuable at their destination. Stress lowers their immune responses to infectious organisms and puts them at risk for infectious diseases.

Cattle trailers should be adaptable to ensure sufficient ventilation, wind protection, and cover for protection from excessive sunlight or inclement weather. Loading ramps should have solid sides, be one cow wide, and not exceed 20 degrees incline. Steps with 4 inch rise are preferred to cleats. If cleats are used, the distance between cleats should be about 8 inches. No gaps should be left between the transport vehicle and the ramp sides before loading. The loading ramp should be positioned so that cattle do not face sunlight when loading.

Cattle should never be transported if they have not been watered and fed recently. Access to water should be provided up until 2 hours prior to loading and to grass hay until the time to load. Legume hay or grain rations should be avoided. They are more likely to cause scours (diarrhea) and in turn, slick footing.

The transport compartment should be clean and have bedding provided that reduces the risk of slippage. The cattle should be packed for transport close enough to reduce chance to fight or fall but not so closely as to cause overheating. Partitions should be used to eliminate excess space. Cattle from different herds or pens should not be mixed during transport to minimize fighting. Different sized cattle should be sorted and loaded into trailer compartments by similar weight. Adult bulls should be transported in separate individual compartments. Cattle should not be transported with other species.

Freshened cows (producing milk) must be milked out prior to being transported. If dairy cattle are in transport for 12 or more hours, they should be unloaded, milked, and fed and watered. Calves that have a dry navel and are able to walk may be transported, if they can remain dry and the temperature is not less than 60oF. Cows in late pregnancy should not be transported. If transport is unavoidable because of natural disasters or need for veterinary care, they should be in individual compartments with enough room to lie down. Cattle that are lame at a walk should not be transported. Those with fever should not be transported for anything other than veterinary care.

If transporting cattle in cold weather, they should be checked for signs of cold stress, such as eating bedding material, frozen nasal secretions, or shivering. If signs of cold stress occur, further travel should be delayed if adjustments to the transport vehicle cannot be done to improve protection from inclement weather. U.S. Code 49, Chapter 805, Section 80502 requires that animals cannot be transported more than 28 hours without stopping for food, water, and rest for at least 5 consecutive hours.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. The stress of transport can lower cattle immune responses.**
- 2. Transported cattle must be rested at least by 28 hours of travel.**
- 3. Cattle should be fed and watered up until 2 hours prior to travel.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 200 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.