

For immediate release:

Building 'Team North America' for livestock transport

Streamlining approaches is key next step for Canada and U.S. programs.

Calgary, AB, Feb. 5, 2009: Canada and the U.S. share the longest undefended border in the world. As evidenced at the recent Livestock Transport Conference in Calgary, AB., the livestock and transport industries in both countries also share a strong commitment to progress in improving the care of livestock hauled within and across their borders.

Leading examples of this commitment are training and certification programs for livestock transport, developed and implemented in both countries through cross-sector cooperation.

These programs include Canada's Certified Livestock Transporter (CLT) program and the U.S.-based Transporter Quality Assurance (TQA) program. At the same time, industry North America-wide is moving toward third-party livestock transport audits as part of quality assurance, lead by the recent development of the American Meat Institute's Animal Welfare Audit for Transportation. All are programs that not only show industry leadership but reflect where progress is headed around the globe.

The next step in the evolution of this trend is to further streamline approaches, says Susan Church, Manager of Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC), a major organizer and sponsor of the conference.

"All of the countries and programs have different approaches, but the information on how to properly load, handle and unload livestock is virtually the same whether you're in North America, Europe or Australia," says Church. "That gives us a great basis to work together to continually streamline what we're doing. Truckers truck all over. Our industries cross borders. Our programs always need to be mindful of that."

The Livestock Transport Conference was designed to bring people together and raise the profile of livestock transport, to help support that type of thinking and progress, she says. Over 120 people attended the conference including transporters, livestock producers, researchers and other industry leaders from across North America.

A core part of the program included updates on the livestock transport training programs, which included presentations by Church on the CLT program and by Erik Risa of the National Pork Board on the TQA program.

Canada's industry-driven progress

The Certified Livestock Transporter (CLT) program is a comprehensive training course and support service for livestock truckers, shippers and receivers. It focuses on the humane and safe relocation of livestock and the regulatory requirements for Canada and the US.

CLT was started in Alberta based on industry, largely through AFAC, looking into what was needed to support high quality livestock transport. The key priority that emerged was training, and a series of

consultations and developments lead to implementation of the program in 2007. It builds on previous industry progress in developing humane handling guidelines for unfit livestock.

“It was industry that drove the whole process,” says Church. “And that continues today as the CLT program evolves.”

The CLT training program component offers core content for all species and breakout modules for cattle, hogs, horses, sheep and poultry. CLT provides species-specific customized training on livestock handling, loading and biosecurity. It includes recognizing and dealing with livestock not fit to be transported and emergency accident response.

“The whole concept of CLT is to be multi species, because many of our drivers handle more than one species,” says Church. “Our manuals are living documents and we are always looking to improve.”

Supporting professional development

To date, the CLT program has trained over 50 trainers and held several workshops per year for truckers and others involved with handling animals in and around livestock transport. Over 400 drivers have completed the training.

Industry has embraced the program and cited many benefits, ranging from improved transport, biosecurity and animal care, to fewer problems and better understanding of standards and compliance, says Church. “One of the most encouraging things we hear from truckers is they are recognizing and valuing both the program content and service as a value to their professional development.”

The service component is critical, she says. “A key to continued progress is keeping up a dialogue with the transporters,” says Church. “That is why CLT is set up not just as a training program but as an ongoing service. We communicate regularly through a dedicated Web site, www.livestocktransport.ca, regular emails and other methods to let our transporters know what they need to be up on.”

Another important step is greater involvement from processors, she says. “Our original hope was that more of our Canadian meat plants would embrace this concept, ask for the training and go so far as to host or sponsor workshops. We’re not there yet, but we’re making progress. Our relationship has been particularly good with the Canadian pork industry, which has done a tremendous job from an overall standpoint with livestock care programs.”

Moving toward universal training

The CLT program is already built to dovetail in many respects with the U.S.-based TQA program, she says. Working together to further streamline approaches is a top priority for the future.

“In my view, other than the Canadian laws, the core content of the two programs is parallel. Most of the TQA trainers in Canada are including the Canadian laws. And the groups involved with both programs are now talking about how we can build the training component into one program that everybody recognizes.

“I think in the next year we’re going to see more of a melding and collaboration, and that’s a big part of what the Livestock Transport Conference is about – driving things down the road collectively from the standpoint of our programming in North America.”

The ABC’s of TQA

That feeling is shared by Erik Risa, Manager of Certification Programs for the National Pork Board. The board delivers the Transport Quality Assurance (TQA) program, a U.S.-based program that is also recognized and conducts training sessions in Canada. Though focused solely on swine, the TQA program offers certification and shares the same goals of helping transporters, producers and handlers with proper livestock transport.

The TQA program grew in part out of other pork board quality assurance efforts, says Risa. All share a goal to build trust with customers and consumers, which means showing and increasingly proving that things are done right.

“I think for too long, animal agriculture have not been telling our story,” says Risa. “For many people, often their only picture into agriculture is when they’re sharing the road with our transporters. So we’re always working toward establishing trust with our consumers that are purchasing pork. They have a demand for standards and one way to promote and ensure those standards is certification.”

Building trust, boosting image

The pork industry is often portrayed unfairly, he says. “Sometimes we’re depicted as the bare foot farmer who’s out sloppin’ hogs on the back 40. Other times we’re labeled as the industry full of factory farming. The reality is so many family farmers are out there working to make a living every day who are doing all the right things.”

A driving force behind TQA and similar programs is to move the stereotype of today’s industry more toward a professional model, he says. “We want a better reflection of what are. We want the industry to be viewed as a profession with trusted standards and approaches.”

National Pork Board quality assurance programs have addressed food safety at the packing plant and farm level, including a component with on-farm audits. TQA was developed to complete the quality assurance chain, where caring properly for livestock during transport is a major component.

First implemented in 2002, TQA is voluntary but today in most cases has become a required part of market access for transporters to deliver hogs to meat plants. National Pork Board trains TQA advisors, who train TQA handlers, who conduct training sessions. Today there are over 350 advisors and 15,000 handlers, including several advisors and over 1,000 handlers in Canada.

The program is updated every three years and is currently on its third version, which includes a more inclusive name change from the original “Trucker Quality Assurance” and expansion to include all sizes of pigs. “We know that in the U.S. on any one day there are over 600,000 pigs that are on the road, and we know that those aren’t all market hogs,” explains Risa.

More collaboration ahead

An ongoing goal of TQA is to continually strive to meet consumer expectations, he says, and the pork board is keeping a close eye on the growing push toward livestock transport audits. “We’ll continually be challenged to bolster credibility. So we’ll be looking at other ways to make this program more credible and relevant to what our consumers expect from us.

“Certainly there is a lot of industry discussion. We know at the packing plant level, the work that AMI is doing is great to help demonstrate that we’re doing the right things. But before we move to third party

audits and involvement with our program, we'll want to make sure we have the right assessment program and benchmarking approaches to evaluate the job that we're doing."

Release of the next TQA program update is slated for 2010, with new materials and fine-tuning based on new science. Like CLT, the program is also looking forward to further opportunities for collaboration.

"That's why we're participating in events like this Livestock Transport Conference," says Risa. "We want to continue to have a dialogue, whether that's for North America or across species. Livestock care is a cross-industry, cross species issue, and there are many benefits to working together."

The Livestock Care Conference was hosted by Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC) and the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC). It was sponsored by National Cattle Feeders' Association, Animal Transportation Association, Alberta Livestock Industry Development Fund and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Program. More information on the conference including additional articles on several of the speaker presentations, is available on the CLT Web site at www.livestocktransport.ca and through the AFAC Web site at www.afac.ab.ca.

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