

*For immediate release:*

## **Progress & potholes: Transporters talk the issues**

*Livestock Transport Conference highlights animal care leadership role for truckers and others involved in the relocation of livestock.*

**Calgary, AB, Feb. 5, 2009:** “Are we there yet?” was the theme of the Livestock Transport Conference in Calgary, AB, that brought together over 120 people including transporters, livestock producers, researchers and other industry leaders. The goal was straightforward: to discuss a North American focus on achieving humane, safe and effective livestock transport.

There have been many advances in science, handling guidelines and training programs in recent years, both for humane livestock handling in general and increasingly for transporting livestock. Among the examples are Canada’s Certified Livestock Transporter (CLT) program – a comprehensive training course and support service for livestock truckers, shippers and receivers that offers certification.

A similar U.S. based program is Transporter Quality Assurance (TQA). As well, North America 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.

Where the rubber really hits the road on the livestock transport animal care issue is on the front line, with the truckers and others involved in the relocation of cattle, swine and other livestock every day.

The day-long Livestock Transport Conference featured over a dozen speakers covering latest developments, new science and a range of key issues. To take the temperature of the real progress and challenges in the industry, the conference ended the day with a discussion and panel Q&A session with three long-time livestock haulers – Daryl Toews, Dave O’Rourke and Keith Horsburgh. Their comments provide a snapshot of the path forward and how transporters are embracing livestock care as part of good stewardship and good business.

### **Right direction, forging ahead**

Toews, who supervises all load coordination and health protocols for Lester Reimer Trucking, captured a prevailing attitude of the day: “We have come a long way. But if we say ‘we’re there,’ that we’ve done all we need to, I think we’re limiting ourselves. We’re never there. We have great opportunity to continually improve and do a better job.”

O’Rourke, former owner of Ontario-based O’Rourke transport and currently Ontario Farm Animal Council’s livestock transport specialist, emphasized the importance of ongoing transporter education. “Animal care must be foremost in every transporter’s mind. It takes just as much preparation to move an animal two miles down the road and do it right as it does to move it across the country. Programs such as

TQA and CLT are excellent. I think the future of our industry is training, training and more training, to continually get better.”

Horsburgh, owner of Alberta-based Grace Cattle Carrier’s Inc, echoed that call. “What we’ve heard today from all the speakers has been so positive, and we need to build on that. As transporters, we are a critical component between the producer and the consumer and we are probably the most visible component of this industry. Livestock are moved a lot in their lifetime, and the efficiency of the system is one area we can address with our industry peers. No-one likes change, but sometimes change is a great opportunity to improve things.”

### **More key thoughts**

Overall, the three transporters recapped key messages they felt stood out from the conference and provided thoughts on a range of subjects. Here are some additional highlights of their comments:

**Benefits of a national approach.** Horsburgh: “There is huge benefit to having a nationally recognized system and I think we are on the right track with promoting our CLT program.” O’Rourke: “To have a national association (for transporters) would also be excellent, but it takes a lot of time and cooperation to get that together. The benefits to our country would probably be fantastic.”

**Incentive and recognition programs.** O’Rourke: “Ontario Pork used to have a good handling awards program, and the truckers that were in the top percentage would be recognized at a meeting and given a certificate. That was certainly an incentive. Personally, I used to like when my trucks went to the U.S. and buyers would call back and say they really like the way our Canadian trucks come into their plants. And that probably meant as much to us as anything.”

**New research on ventilation, temperature.** O’Rourke: “A lot of the new ideas coming out with are worth looking at. I don’t think we need to spend millions of dollars, but trials certainly don’t hurt and the bottom line is common sense should dictate what we do.”

**Overcoming challenges.** Toews: “In the past, as transporters we have become frustrated at times when we are unacquainted with regulations and we might be accused of something that we didn’t know about. We are always judged by our worst performance. We can do a thousand loads perfectly, but if we have one poor load that’s the one that everybody sees. Sometimes the problems blamed on us go back to the shipper – that’s an area where I think the audits shippers face will help.”

**Training and focus.** O’Rourke: “In the past, many of drivers we hired already knew how to handle livestock because they were farm boys. Things are different today. That’s one reason training is so important. Animal welfare must be foremost in everyone’s mind. No excuses. There is no ‘ignorance is bliss.’ It’s not bliss, it’s just stupid.”

**Embracing the public eye.** Toews: “In the 27 years I’ve been involved in livestock transport, I’ve seen tremendous change and improvement. It’s been fantastic from that standpoint. And as transporters, I do feel we have one of the greatest opportunities because we are the people the public sees.”

**High returns for good welfare.** Horsburgh: “This is the age of diminishing returns. But as far as animal welfare in livestock transport, I don’t think we have anything to complain about with what we’re asked to do. I think that what we’ve heard today has been so positive, and we can take this to all of our people to continue to improve our industry. Animal welfare is good for the industry and good for business. It’s builds customer and consumer confidence. One of the speakers said: ‘we need to be transparent and open in everything we do’ – I agree with that one hundred percent.”

**Canada on right path.** O'Rourke: "I've never heard so many good speakers all in one place in one day on this issue, and it's nice to know Canada is on the right track. When our American friends come up and tell us that, it's pretty good to hear. The one thing we need to take home with us is that our industry has to embrace animal welfare. It's important. It's a non-issue as far as our rates are concerned. It's nice to know we're doing our job well, and we have to consider how to do it better."

**Cross-sector, multi-expertise teamwork.** Horsburgh: "I also agree to make progress all of us in this room need to continually lean on our peers and industry experts. Relationships equal communication. We need to bring forward all our interests, not our individual positions, where we have the same focus on humane, safe and effective livestock handling and transport."

The Livestock Transport 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](http://www.livestocktransport.ca) and through the AFAC Web site at [www.afac.ab.ca](http://www.afac.ab.ca).

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