

Truckers affect farming's image

By Wendy Dudley
Freelance writer

CALGARY — Livestock haulers need to be aware that they reflect the entire farming industry, say members of the trucking industry.

"People see a liner go by full of live animals. That's the farm. They think producers are raising a barn full of pets," said Dave O'Rourke, the former owner of an Ontario trucking company and hauler for 35 years.

"We used to just hire farm boys, but things are different today. Ignorance is not bliss," said O'Rourke, a livestock specialist with the Ontario Farm Animal Council.

So it's up to truckers to present a positive image, he said.

"The industry has to embrace animal welfare. And the future of our industry is to train, train, train. We have to take that time."

Keith Horsburgh, owner of Grace Cattle Carriers Inc. in Brooks, Alta., couldn't agree more.

"Those of us who work with animals are at ground zero. This is where it all starts. So we have to raise the bar to a more professional standard because that's what the public and customers want," he said.

"Truckers are often the forgotten component between the producer and the consumer, but we're the most visible. When you see a liner, you know it's hauling live animals. Animal welfare in the public eye is becoming a bigger issue every day, not every year."

A recent study of beef cattle hauling in Alberta revealed that a large percentage of truckers had less than two years experience, a troublesome statistic, said Karen Schwartzkopf-Genswein, a specialist in beef welfare and behaviour at Agriculture Canada's Lethbridge Research Centre.

"Drivers need proper training. The fact there are so many new drivers could create an issue," she said.

Incorrect loading

The study also indicated that trucks are being overloaded in the belly and deck and underloaded in the nose and back. Temperature fluctuations are also a concern, ranging on some trips from zero to 24 C.

"We need to look at the effects of temperature, time and loading densities on shrinkage in weight," she said.

Alberta trucker Rick Sincennes suspects overloading is a result of driver inexperience and truck design that used to require the bulk of the weight be placed over the axles. New designs now allow for more even loading, he said.

All livestock haulers in Canada should have to be certified, said Susan Church, manager of Alberta Farm Animal Care, which developed a Certified Livestock Transport (CLT) program.

Most truckers hauling hogs must be certified through the Transport Quality Assurance program, and U.S. plants will only accept hogs from Canada if haulers are TQA-certified.

"But so far, CLT is not mandatory, and I think it should be," Church said.

Horsburgh, a CLT instructor, agrees, noting that all his drivers must take the CLT course. He would like to see all livestock handlers, not just truck-

ers, have CLT training.

Third-party audits at the Maple Leaf Pork plant in Brandon will soon include a transportation component, said Bryan Hay, head of the plant's hog welfare.

Transportation audits should be developed to ensure humane treatment of animals, food safety and worker safety, said Ashley Peterson of the American Meat Institute's (AMI) animal welfare committee.

"In 2008, the Westland-Hallmark meat recall turned the industry on its

ear. We knew we had to go further," said Peterson, referring to an under-

cover video that revealed workers at the California meat plant kicking sick cows and forcing them to walk into kill pens by using forklifts. It posed a food safety issue because cows that cannot walk present a BSE risk.

The audits help determine areas requiring improvement and build customer confidence,

she said. Haulers need to be aware of how weather can affect livestock in transit,

how to humanely load and unload animals, how to use handling tools such as nylon flags instead of electrical prods, and how to move fatigued animals or respond to accidents, said Jennifer Woods, a certified animal welfare auditor.

Woods developed Canada's first training program for haulers on how to handle livestock-related accidents. She recently wrote the AMI's Animal Welfare Audit for Transportation.

Audits are "definitely the way to go," said Geoff Urton, an animal welfare co-ordinator with the British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

But there have to be incentives, not just penalties, he added.



Keith Horsburgh says his drivers must take the Certified Livestock Transport program.

(Wendy Dudley photo)

Swine thrive under humane conditions

By Wendy Dudley
Freelance writer

CALGARY — Several years ago, Bryan Hay sensed that animal welfare was going to be the next target for criticism of the livestock industry. So he began exploring ways to improve humane treatment of pigs at Maple Leaf's hog processing plant in Brandon.

"I was going to a lot of conferences and hearing the same thing. I could see the writing on the wall. I could see it coming. I figured either we fix it, or it will get fixed for us, and you don't want the latter," said Hay, the plant's senior manager of hog logistics and animal welfare.

Today, all of the plant's actions are documented, he said.

"It's not OK now to just say what we are doing. You have to be able to prove it, by recording it."

Applying guidelines offered by Temple Grandin, a world-renowned expert in livestock facility design, the Brandon plant's barn was made to address humane issues, Hay told a livestock transport conference here Jan. 29.

Plant alleys are wide and well lit, with additional receiving doors and gates so that six trucks can be unloaded at a time, instead of the usual three or four.

"It gave us a good flow of pig movement with pigs penned in the direction of the flow. We can receive 2,000 pigs

an hour, if we need to," Hay said.

Drivers are now less frustrated because they can pull in, unload and be gone, he said.

"And that makes handling easier. Frustrated drivers are bad handlers."

Noise levels are monitored to ensure pigs aren't under stress.

Good handling also results in better quality product, he said.

The plant's unloading procedures are monitored through weekly in-house audits, video cameras and staff from the Canadian

Food Inspection Agency.

"You can't be everywhere at once, and the best way to audit is when people don't think they are being watched. We've noticed that when they are watched, their behaviour changes."

Stressed pigs vocalize more, so noise levels also are monitored, he said.

Maple Leaf issues an eight-page document to its producers and truckers, outlining its standards for trucking density, bedding and condition of shipped hogs.

A transportation component will soon be added to its third-party audits. All its drivers are required to have livestock hauling certification.

Since 2003, the plant has discouraged producers from shipping sick or lame animals.

"If they're stressed, either don't move them or humanely euthanize them."

Since then, there has been a reduction in the number of pigs arriving dead at the plant, he said.

Maple Leaf supports the ongoing study at the Prairie Swine Centre in Saskatoon that is researching ways to reduce stress when shipping pigs to abattoirs.

The plant also banned general use of electrical prods.

"Some thought if it wasn't energized, it was OK to use, but we said, 'if it's not energized, you don't need to carry it.'"

But standards only work if they are enforced, Hay said.

"If an issue is raised, you have to do something about it. And you have to have good co-operation between regulatory staff (CFIA vets) and management, to ensure compliance."

Other swine study results presented at the Calgary conference confirmed that aggressive use of electrical prods, stress, overcrowding during transit and extreme weather increase pig injuries and deaths.

Sorting pigs a day before shipping reduced stress and fatigue, as did withdrawing feed and not mixing unfamiliar pigs during transport.

Sharing different ideas and hearing about what works in other operations is important, said Hay.

"Humane handling is a noncompetitive issue, so we can all trade ideas."



Bryan Hay says the Maple Leaf hog plant in Brandon was designed to allow stress free unloading.

(Wendy Dudley photo)

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