



Input needed to study cattle transportation practices in Alberta

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), the Alberta Beef Producers, the Alberta Livestock Industry Development Fund and the Alberta Farm Animal Care Association have embarked on a two-year transport benchmark project to study industry practices for transporting cattle within Alberta. The study results from a recent proposal from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to amend a thirty-year old section of the Health of Animals Act that deals with transporting livestock.

Responding to concerns voiced by cattle producers, AAFC scientist Dr. Karen Schwartzkopf-Genswein and Luciano Gonzalez in Lethbridge, Alberta is engaging the industry to study how current transport practices in the largest beef producing province in Canada support the need to review the Act.

The survey was launched in July 2007 and documents distinct practices for short-haul (<400km) and long-haul (>400km) transport in Alberta. Among the questions, operators are being asked to document things such as feed, water and rest intervals. To date twenty-four trucking companies in Alberta have participated and over 6,000 surveys have been collected. The goal is to collect a minimum of 10,000 surveys to get an accurate summary of current transport practices.

Data from the survey will be valuable to the cattle transport industry and address concerns put forth by CFIA. The information will help develop a thorough understanding of the norms and non-standard practices within the industry, a necessary first step to help define current practices and identify areas where research may be required.

“Documenting current industry practice is important because the day-to-day management may vary somewhat from the recommendations outlined in the Codes of

Practice as adherence to the codes is voluntary,” says Dr. Schwartzkopf-Genswein. “The outcome of this study will help maintain and build an industry that has the highest standards in animal health and well-being.”

The proposed changes from CFIA also coincide with the first ever global standards for the transport of live animals from the World Organization for Animal Health. Consumers worldwide are demanding higher standards for animal welfare, including their rearing and transport. Canada must maintain the highest standards of animal welfare or risk losing share to countries that have implemented rigorous regulations.

The events that affect animals, like transport stress, are linked directly to actual outcomes in meat quality, food safety and animal welfare. Stress causes a number of physical changes that can affect food flavour and quality.

This project has also collected video footage of proper animal loading and unloading procedures, handling procedures within the truck, and proper safety precautions for handlers. This information will become part of a training video for new trucking personnel through the Certified Livestock Transporter (CLT) training program.

For more information or to participate in the study, beef transport operators in Alberta should contact:

Dr. Karen Schwartzkopf-Genswein, Research Scientist
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Tel: 403-317-3354
gensweink@agr.gc.ca