

Transporting Dairy Cows

Preventing downer cows

All transported animals should have a comfortable and safe journey and arrive at their destination in a fit and healthy state. It is important to prepare dairy cows for both the journey and the intended destination, and to handle them in a manner that minimises stress and injury. The metabolic status of dairy cows is complicated and interconnected. Lactating cows, including those in late lactation, have an increased risk of becoming recumbent if not adequately prepared and managed.

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Messages for Farmers

Plan

Transport should be planned at least a week in advance. Confirm destination and expected journey time and distance, and consider what preparation is needed to protect cow welfare. For lactating cows, even those in late lactation, transport time and distance should be short.

- For cows being transported to slaughter, confirm what plant will be used and the expected slaughter time.
- Cows being sent to the saleyard have an unknown final destination, which may include many more hours on a truck. Take this into account in their preparation.

Fit for Transport

Cows must be selected by the farmer/stock agent to ensure they are healthy and fit for transport. They must be fit enough to withstand the expected journey.

- Cows should be properly dried off. Cows that are still lactating should be milked immediately before being transported.
- Cows should have a Body Condition Score of 3 or more. Cows with a BCS less than 2.5 will need a veterinary certificate before they can travel. Cows 2.5 to 3 may go to slaughter or to alternative grazing only, but are not to be sent to saleyards.

Fit for Transport

It is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 1999 to present animals that are unfit for the journey, and for transport operators to load unfit stock.

Animals must not be transported unless they are fit enough to withstand the entire journey without suffering unnecessary or unreasonable pain or distress.

Consult your veterinarian if you are unsure about the suitability of animals for transport.

Preparation

Consider where your cows are going and how long it will be until they are unloaded at their destination. Prepare them appropriately. The longer the journey, the better prepared the cows need to be.

- If cows are expected to have a change of diet at their destination (e.g. winter grazing on crop), then prepare and use a feed transition plan.



- Standing cows off pasture helps them to travel more comfortably. Stand cows off pasture/green feed for at least 4 hours, but no more than 12 hours, before transport. Lactating cows should not be held off pasture for more than 6 hours.
- Feed all cows hay or baleage during the stand-off time and give them free access to clean water.
- Cows should be stood off on a grazed out paddock or stand-off pad rather than concrete to reduce the risk of lameness and to give cows the opportunity to rest before their journey.
- Cows should receive magnesium supplements for 7 days prior to transport.
- Calcium supplementation may be beneficial in certain situations, particularly if low calcium feeds such as cereal and maize silage, and PKE are provided on-farm. Consult your veterinarian for local advice.
- When transporting lactating cows (other than to slaughter) teat spray well to protect against infection.

Messages for Transporters

Communication is key.

- Plan transport with farmers a week in advance or as early as possible. Confirm destination, expected journey time and expected pick up time so the farmer can sufficiently prepare the cows for the expected journey.
- Cows should be handled in a manner that minimises stress and injury.
- Use covers on the top deck of crates.
- Cows must not be deprived of water for more than 12 hours, or deprived of feed for more than 24 hours.
- Lactating cows must be milked at least once every 24 hours.



Messages for Saleyard Operators and Meat Processors

Communication is key.

- Plan transport with farmers a week in advance or as early as possible. When selecting lactating and/or cull cows for sale or slaughter, consider where the cows should be sent to minimise the number of journeys, journey times and the travelling distance.
- Minimise the holding times for lactating cows in yards.
- Lactating cows must be milked at least once every 24 hours.
- Cows must not be deprived of water for more than 12 hours, or deprived of feed for more than 24 hours.

Lactating Cows

It is recommended that cows are dried off prior to transport. Where this is not possible, cows must be milked so that the udder is not distended when the cow is picked up to reduce the risk of the cow becoming recumbent (unable to stand) during transport.

For all lactating cows, transport time and distance should be short.

Lactating cows should also receive magnesium supplementation for

7 days prior to transport. Calcium supplementation may be beneficial in certain situations, particularly if low calcium feeds such as cereal and maize silage, and PKE are provided on-farm. Consult your veterinarian for local advice.

It is essential that cows continue to be fed (dry feed) and watered up to and immediately prior to transport. An increasing proportion of hay or bailage should be fed in the week prior to transport to provide a more persistent energy reserve.

For more information www.mpi.govt.nz

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