

“World’s best practice livestock handling and transport procedures to optimise animal welfare and product integrity”

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Objective of study tour

To closely examine livestock transport technology and training. In particular, to examine livestock handling and transport equipment and facilities, to increase my capacity to provide diverse and innovative training packages that are useful for livestock operators in pursuit of world’s best practice.

Key findings

- New and innovative ways of developing livestock transport and handling facilities
- Better mechanisms for the evaluation of reward and training of livestock transport operators
- Improved means of communication between segments of the food chain

Key benefits

- Improved livestock transport practices by utilising the knowledge and experience of key sectors of the Australian and US Beef Industries, that is livestock transporters, producers and processors
- Implementation of high quality training packages that summarise and highlight to each individual how important they are in meat quality and food safety
- Improvements in communication between producers’ livestock transporters and processors, this will be achieved by producing a package that comprehensively covers handling and transport specifications and procedures for the key operators in specific regions
- The supply of a food product that has been handled in a humane manner with emphasis on ensuring optimal animal health and welfare and improved food quality and integrity



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Cattle transport audit

Each year the cattle industry loses millions of dollars due to bruises and dark cutting which reduces the value of the carcass. Careful handling of cattle during loading and unloading will help reduce losses and improve animal welfare. Conscientious drivers who avoid sudden stops and accelerate smoothly play an important role in preventing cattle from going down whilst on the truck.

People tend to manage the things that they measure. Auditing and scoring of handling is being used in many operations as part of their quality assurance program in the United States and parts of Australia. My objective is to design a cattle transport audit that is suitable for transport operators, producers, feedlots and processors to use. The primary use for this audit will be for the transport operator to audit the feedlot, farm and abattoir. The second use of this auditing system

will be for the producer, feedlot operator and processor to audit the truck driver when he/she comes to load or deliver the livestock. The aim of this auditing system is not to say “got you”, you are doing that procedure incorrectly but it is merely to tighten up the areas in which we can do things better and more effectively and efficiently. Having an auditing system in place also means that the minimum standards are met for animal welfare reasons. It also allows the farm, truck driver, feedlot or abattoir (whoever is being audited at the time) to be aware that if something fails, then why did it fail? Is there a problem? What is the best corrective action and practice that could be implemented to rectify the problem and current situation? Therefore to pass an audit means that there is a requirement for constant vigilance, resulting in each sector in the supply chain doing their bit to contribute to product quality.

Some critical control points (CCPs) that would be advantageous if they were to be objectively scored are as follows:

- Percentage of cattle that don't slip or fall *Goal – 10% or less.*
- Percentage of cattle that walk or trot off the truck
- Percentage of cattle that strike objects getting on or off the truck
- Percentage of cattle that vocalize (moo) whilst being loaded or unloaded *Goal – 3% or less.* If the cattle are mooing this means that they are stressed
- Percentage of cattle prodded with an electric prod *Goal – ≤ 1%*
- Prompt loading and unloading. Excellent if unloading starts within 15 minutes of arrival OR there is a serious problem if unloading does not start until more than 60 minutes after arrival.
- Stocking density according to guidelines
- Truck cleanliness
- Truck Maintenance; are there broken parts on the crate?

Other things to take note of whilst objectively scoring the above CCPs are:

- *Condition of the race, ramps, fences gates and floors* – If there are any very slippery spots, they should be noted so that they can be repaired. Also make a note of the presence of sharp edges.
- *Cattle Handling* – Are there any problems with noise such as yelling? Also important to note good practices that can be shared with other drivers or stock handlers.
- *Vehicle Condition (Truck)* – Are there any broken parts that need to be repaired on both the prime mover and more importantly inside or outside the crate?
- *Heat Stress* – Are there any cattle that have or are suffering heat stress?
- *Sick or injured animals* – Are there any sick animals present before getting on the truck? Need to identify and confirm that the animal was sick or injured before being transported. If not was the animal injured during transit? If so how did it occur? Identify the problem and then fix it.
- *Acts of Abuse* – Acts of abuse will not be tolerated. A driver or handler fails if he/she is observed beating cattle or sticking any object into sensitive parts of the animal such as the eyes, nose, mouth, ears or rectum. The audit

will also be failed if the people inflict injuries such as breaking a tail to make an animal move. This type of behaviour will not be tolerated.

Cattle handling and transport training course

Transporting cattle for a living is a very demanding job. As a truck driver it is important to skillfully handle the livestock, your vehicle, varying weather and facility conditions plus obey dispatch and company directions. Added to all these drivers are constantly faced with difficult to understand animal welfare and transportation laws that they must abide by. So at the end of the day drivers have to examine the bottom line and that is to earn a living and not compromise either their own personal safety or the well being of the livestock.

The benefits from a training course will include drivers and owners clarifying their legal liabilities and responsibilities. This course will explain who's responsible for what. Laws vary between states and government representatives will clarify responsibilities with different locations. Your customers will recognize that you are doing the best you can transporting animals safely, effectively and humanely. All livestock operators will be working from the same set of rules. This will minimise confusion between executives and drivers. This will relieve some of the pressure brought on by not knowing exactly what to do in a given situation. For example, if an animal dies on the truck from heat stress, whose responsibility is it?

Over time I envisage that this package will be further utilised by stock handlers, on farm, feedlot, sale yards and abattoirs. I will closely work with Truckcare (Livestock Transport Quality Assurance Program) and members of the Australian Livestock Transporters Association to develop my training package in line with their quality management program.

Summary of course content

This practical course will explain what transport companies and their truck drivers need to know and use, every day on the job. The course will have significant industry input right from the start. All participants will receive a manual which will also include animal welfare and transport codes of practice.

The full course will cover:

- **Basic Cattle Psychology** (behaviour, how they react)
- **Facilities** (what to expect – good and bad)

- **Cattle Handling** (tips and techniques)
- **Transportation**
 1. preparation and pre loading
 2. inspection and accepting the load
 3. unfit animals
 4. appropriate use of electric prods
 5. sale yards
 6. driver safety (occupational health and safety)
 7. loading and pen density of livestock
- **Discussion Sessions**
 1. poor facilities (reporting problems)
 2. stress (human and animal)
 3. stress and its impact on meat and product quality
 4. rough handling
 5. who is responsible for what?
- **Time to hit the road** (paperwork requirements)
- **Special Cases and Emergencies** (injuries and breakdowns)
- **Unloading** (procedures, safety and maintaining cleanliness of equipment)

Conclusion

The study awards program has assisted and provided me with an enhanced knowledge of the livestock transport industry both domestically and internationally. I have been exposed to new and innovative ways of developing improved handling facilities; better mechanisms for the evaluation and reward and training of livestock transport operators and better means of communication between the segments of the food supply chain. I have established and developed new sources and networks of information and expertise that will enable me to provide ongoing support with my new **Cattle Handling and Transport Training** initiative. I have gained significant knowledge, confidence and a better understanding on how best to implement change. The end result will be better quality control over segments of the food chain that has been neglected and ignored in terms of targeted education and training.

