



INDUSTRY REPUTATION

An effective cull cow strategy is needed, say industry representatives

As I was writing this issue's cover story on cull cows and transportation, I came across additional information that I did not have room to include in the layout. For instance, according to a Canadian Meat Council 2013 factsheet on dairy cows in Canada, a total 412,382 dairy and beef cows were slaughtered in Canadian federally-inspected establishments in 2012, and 501,212 in 2011. With an average cull rate of 25 per cent in a dairy herd, about 250,000 dairy cattle are sent to slaughter each year. This is 250,000 opportunities for the industry's image to be put to the test, and just as many reasons why the Canadian dairy industry needs to ensure cull cows being transported to auction barns or abattoirs are not only fit for the journey, but are still healthy when they reach their final destination.

According to National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council (NFAHWC) research presented to the University of British Columbia's animal welfare program during the 2016 NFAHWC forum, the top three reasons dairy producers cull cows are due to reproductive problems, followed by mastitis, feet and leg problems and low milk production. In its findings, it reported research is needed to better characterize cull cow management and movement from farm to slaughter, and the factors that lead to long delays before slaughter. It also stated more communication is needed to make producers and herd veterinarians aware of the potential long travel distances and delays, and for them to factor this in when making culling decisions. This is not unlike remarks made at Dairy Farmers of Ontario's (DFO) recent spring policy conference on the need for a comprehensive cull cow roadmap that takes into account all the responsibilities of various stakeholders—from the farm to the auction barn.

There are many factors to consider when preparing a cow to be transported to a sales or auction barn, such as its health status, how long the journey will be, weather conditions and even its size. According to recommended practices for transportation in the *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle*, section 5, each person responsible for transporting animals in Canada, or arranging for their transport, must ensure the entire trans-

portation process, including loading, transit and unloading, does not cause injury or undue suffering to the animals.

"The problem right now is there are too many broken or lame cows arriving at auction marts," says Todd Duffield, veterinarian and University of Guelph professor in the department of population medicine. He says the public's image of producers, auction marts and the dairy industry is always at stake. And then there's the issue of cow welfare, especially images of a cow in pain, or experiencing unnecessary or prolonged suffering, which can further damage the industry's reputation.

George MacNaughton, DFO's operations director, says producers should remember the health of their cows when they arrive at an auction barn is a reflection of their farm's practices, which can adversely affect the dairy industry's image. "Auction barns are open to the public, and shipping compromised cows can damage the dairy industry's public and professional reputation," he says.

MacNaughton adds discussions must take place between producers, veterinarians, and auction barn and abattoir personnel to come up with a plan that considers various management options to develop an effective cull cow strategy.

NATIONAL POST AD

By now you've read, heard and discussed recent developments regarding dairy trade with the United States. The issue garnered much media attention and responses from all levels of government to defend the Canadian dairy system. In its ongoing effort to recognize the support the industry receives from all levels of government and Canadians, as well as inform the public about the dairy system, DFO decided to place a full-page ad in the *National Post's* April 25th Ontario edition. The ad, which was posted on social media and sent to key stakeholders, also aimed to debunk some of the rhetoric regarding Canada's dairy trade stance. You can find a version of the ad in this issue on page 27.



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