



Beef and Dairy Livestock Handling and Transportation Safety Guidelines

Cattle Handling Principles and Best Practices

Proper handling and transportation of livestock is essential for animal safety, comfort and welfare, and also plays a large part in meat quality outcomes, during loading and transporting.

Cattle Handling and Moving Techniques

- Work cattle from the front; apply proper pressure at the point of balance, just behind and across the shoulder blades
- Passing from the front of the point of balance to the back will initiate or accelerate movement
- Work in straight lines going against the flow, then move at an angle with the flow of movement to avoid fight or flight response
- Moving at an angle away from the flight zone releases pressure and reduces stress



Special Considerations for Transporting Livestock

Major causes of stress, injury & bruising

- Excessive handling
- Changing weather patterns
- Unfamiliar environment

Loading and unloading in safe manner

- No gaps
- Non-slip footing in chute and trailer
- Assess safe loading densities for trailer
- Trailer safety inspections



Product Quality Outcomes

- Avoid excessive handling and overuse of handling tools to limit stress and protect from bruising, dark cutters and abscesses

Transportation Best Practices

Loading Safety and Equipment Inspections

- Check gates, tubs, bud boxes, and alley ways to ensure a clear path for moving cattle while limiting distractions and making sure that handler and cattle safety is top of mind
- Prepare and plan for loading animals onto a trailer
- Take into consideration the size of the trailer and the number of cattle and weight of the livestock to be moved
- Overcrowding can lead to added stress on the livestock and impede their comfort and safety



Trailer Hauling Loading Density Guidelines

Follow loading density guidelines to ensure that all safety requirements are met during transport while allowing cattle to travel comfortably and safely.

Mature Cattle Hauling Loading Density Guidelines



Mature Cattle Weight (lbs.)				
800	1,000	1,200	1,400	1,600
Sq/Ft Per Animal (Polled)				
10.4 ft ²	13 ft ²	15.6 ft ²	18.2 ft ²	20.8 ft ²

Trailer/Compartment Size	Square Feet	Number of Head				
		800	1,000	1,200	1,400	1,600
14 ft x 6 ft	84	8	6	5	5	4
16 ft x 6 ft	96	9	7	6	5	4
18 ft x 6 ft	108	10	8	7	6	5
20 ft x 6 ft	120	11	9	7	6	5
22 ft x 6 ft	132	13	10	8	7	6
24 ft x 6 ft	144	13	11	9	7	6
26 ft x 6 ft	156	15	12	10	9	8
30 ft x 6 ft	180	17	14	12	10	9
10 ft x 7 ft	70	7	5	4	4	3
12 ft x 7 ft	84	8	6	5	5	4
16 ft x 7 ft	112	11	9	7	6	5
20 ft x 7 ft	140	13	10	9	7	6
24 ft x 7 ft	168	16	13	10	9	8
28 ft x 7 ft	196	19	15	13	11	9
32 ft x 7 ft	224	21	17	14	12	10

Transportation Best Practices

Vehicle Safety Risk Management

- Conduct inspections; tires, air pressure, tread, fluid and oil levels, check gasoline gauge
- Inspect brakes, suspension system, axels, and chains
- Body of trailer – check latches and locks, pulleys on gates, inspect sections that look distorted
- Interior – check hinges, latches, look for damage on walls, test floor integrity, inspect roof panels
- Check fittings and attachments, and test ramp functionality
- Clean and test headlights and trailer brake lights for transporting

Preparing to Load

Stage, group cattle based on a few factors:

- Number of cattle that can safely fit into the size of the trailer or compartment
- Similar size
- Sex of Cattle – bulls vs. cows
- Age/Size – calves vs. adult animals
- Horned or Polled animals
- Pregnant, lactating, and dry dairy cattle
- Overall condition of the animal and analysis of fitness for transport



Body Condition Scoring – Transport Fitness

- Assess livestock fitness for transport by evaluating key areas:
 - General Health
 - Animal Mobility
 - Body Condition

Compromised Cattle

When handling compromised cattle, it is important to:

- Be cautious as compromised cattle are stressed, and may be more difficult to handle
- Handle them gently, and slowly, giving them time to move as they can
- Compromised cattle should be given extra space to move comfortably
- Cattle that need additional support should always be loaded last so they can be unloaded first at their final destination
- Don't attempt to load cattle if they cannot move without assistance

Non-Ambulatory Cattle – Downers

Never attempt to load non-ambulatory cattle. Cattle that cannot move on their own are called “downers” and should be moved to a safe area for proper care with food and water.

Extreme Weather in Transportation

When loading animals for transport it is important to consider the potential risks posed by extreme temperatures and other weather conditions. Maintaining normal body temperatures is essential for cattle health.

- Check weather forecasts before departure
- Avoid hauling/transporting during the hottest part of the day. Heat temperatures as well as humidity indexes play a large role in the welfare of the cattle during handling and while in transit
- Consider cold temperatures as cattle have increased energy requirements
- Cattle are susceptible to chill and hypothermia in temperatures 32 degrees or below freezing
- Wet cattle are more susceptible to cold stress
- Avoid stopping in BOTH extreme heat and cold temperatures and don't overload trailers
- Assess road conditions and possible road closures on planned route

Beef and Dairy Livestock Handling and Transportation Safety Guidelines

Following these guidelines outlined by the Colorado Beef Quality Assurance program helps to ensure that all safety requirements are met during handling and transporting, while allowing livestock to travel comfortably and safely.



For more information on training and safety certifications, visit Colorado Beef Quality Assurance at BQA.org.

For continued Handling and Transportation Safety training in English and Spanish, visit Colorado Livestock Association Beef and Dairy Livestock Handling and Transportation Safety video, at www.coloradolivestock.org.



High Plains Intermountain Center
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Colorado Livestock Association – www.colordolivestock.org – 970.378.0500