

Load your livestock **safely**

by Lynette Louw

Caring farmers have the best interests of their animals at heart. One of the aspects of farming with livestock that needs a lot of care and attention, is the transportation of livestock. The Livestock Welfare Coordinating Committee is dedicated to promoting livestock welfare in South Africa. The committee issued a code of practice regarding the handling and transport of livestock. In terms of the code of practice, one of the first things to look at, is the vehicle itself.

Vehicles used for transportation

A vehicle used for livestock transportation must first of all be roadworthy. Its indicators must work and its tyres must not be worn. If you are hiring a truck, make sure that the truck has been serviced and that the driver has a valid driver's licence.

The truck must have a non-slip floor that can be easily cleaned and has proper drainage. Adequate ventilation and light is very important, and the truck may not be totally enclosed. The animals must have fresh air all the time. However, if they are going to travel very far, it is important that they are not exposed to sunlight all the time.

The side-walls of the truck must be high enough, so that the animals cannot fall out. In the case of cattle, the walls must be a minimum of 1,8 metres high. In the case of smaller animals such as goats and pigs, the walls must be a minimum of 750 cm high.



The opening where the animals will be loaded and offloaded at the back of the truck, should be at least 2,4 metres wide. These gates must lock properly, but should also be opened with ease by the handlers and driver.

If you choose a truck with partitions which will separate the animals from each other inside the truck, be sure that the partitions are not made of materials that will splinter or break, and hurt the animals. The partitions must be secure and should not move around during transportation.

Before loading

Before you load your animals, there are a few very important things to know about livestock transportation:

- Do not mix adult horned animals with polled animals, as the horned animals may injure the others.
- Do not transport diseased, injured, disabled or blind animals unless special arrangements have been made to keep them as comfortable as possible.
- Mark all blind animals, so that they can be identified and guided when they are offloaded.
- Do not load cows with distended udders that are full of milk. Milk them out beforehand.

- Do not transport adult and juvenile animals together, as the young could be in danger of getting hurt. If they must be together, ensure that they are separated by partitions or pens.
- Make sure that the truck in which your animals are loaded, is clean and washed.
- Weaned calves cannot be transported for more than 12 hours at a time.
- Unweaned calves travelling without their mothers, must have access to milk at regular intervals.

Animal comfort

This firstly entails that the animals should have suitable bedding in the truck. The bedding, which can be coarse sawdust and wood shavings, firstly absorbs urine and wet droppings, but also gives the animals secure footing, preventing them from slipping during transportation.

A very important aspect of transportation is density. This refers to how many animals are loaded into the truck. Too many animals packed into a small space, will lead to injury, suffocation and unnecessary stress. The following guidelines should be followed to the letter:

- **Adult cattle:** 1,4 m² (1,4 x 1,4 metres) per animal.
- **Calves:** 0,3 m² (0,3 x 0,3 metres) per animal.
- **Goats and sheep:** 0,4 m² (0,4 x 0,4 metres) per animal.
- **Porkers:** 0,3 m² (0,3 x 0,3 metres) per animal.
- **Baconers:** 0,4 m² (0,4 x 0,4 metres) per animal.
- **Adult pigs:** 0,8 m² (0,8 x 0,8 metres) per animal.

Be sure to give the animals water and feed before you start loading them, and have water ready for an emergency, especially if it is very hot and animals have to be sprayed to prevent them from dehydrating. Water must be available for distances over 50 km.

The end of the journey

Once your animals have reached the destination, it is time to offload them. Remember that the animals are tired and probably stressed, as they are not used to travelling in this manner. Therefore offloading should take place as calmly and quietly as possible. Remember that any stress will affect a dairy cow's milk production. So handle her with care.

Do NOT lift animals, especially smaller livestock, out by their fleece, head, skin, tails, horns or legs. Make sure that a ramp with a non-slip surface is used. The ramp must be correctly adjusted to the height of the truck, so that it doesn't shift while the animals are walking down.

Do NOT yell, beat or whip animals, and do not use prodders to get them moving.

If you want to learn more about animal transportation, take the time to download a copy of the *Code of Practice: Handling and Transport of Livestock* from www.imqas.co.za/legislation. 