

Safe Transportation Of Beef Cattle

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Have you ever thought about how important transportation is to the profitability of your beef operation?

Producers spend all year producing a calf crop to market. The calves' value can be severely reduced if they are injured or have excessive shrink during transport. The value of cull animals can also be reduced because of injuries during transport.

A safe truck and trailer for transportation is critical. The truck pulling the trailer must have capacity to safely handle the trailer. Trailers should be kept in good condition and repaired when needed, as maintenance saves time. How long will it take to change a flat tire or repair a wheel bearing that goes out while hauling cattle? Breakdowns can be a headache, but if the trailer is checked out and serviced before loading, these problems can be avoided.

Any trailer used to haul cattle should have a nonslip floor. Many producers use a wire cattle panel to provide traction, which works well as long as the trailer is clean before hauling another load. A thin layer of manure can cover the wire if the trailer is not cleaned. Make sure the wire is secure and use more than the minimum number of staples to hold it. Another option is a rubber mat; however, these also must be washed regularly.

The trailer floor should be inspected and replaced when needed. Sharp edges and holes in the floor can injure cattle. The useful life of a wooden trailer floor is probably less than 10 years; if the trailer is not cleaned regularly, the life expectancy is probably less. Cleaning the trailer will help prevent injuries, assist in biosecurity and help prevent the spread of disease.

Sort cattle into groups before loading. The first

sort should be horned and polled. Give cattle with horns more room than the polled cattle, as they can bruise or injure each other. Don't put cows in the same compartment as calves. The amount of room required per animal increases as the size of the animal increases. If hauling bulls that have never been together or have been separated for a considerable time, put them in separate compartments to avoid fighting. When cattle are purchased from separate sources they should be separated in the trailer to prevent them from trying to establish a new social order during hauling.

When closing and opening gates in the trailer, take care to prevent injury. If cattle are overloaded, there can be a great deal of tension on the gates causing the gates to spring toward you when unlatched. Similarly, cattle can hit the gates with the same result.

When loading cattle, move the animals slowly and quietly. Avoiding the use of electric prods and allowing the cattle to establish a flow onto the trailer will help prevent the animals from getting excited and incurring a greater degree of shrink.

Think about the weather when hauling cattle. Cold and icy conditions are not the only reasons for delaying the transport of animals. Summer-time temperatures and high humidity can also be stressful on the animals. The road temperature is usually higher than actual temperature since road surfaces retain heat. Haul cattle in the early morning when the road has had a chance to cool overnight. When hauling in winter, avoid the coldest part of the day – remember that you need to account for wind chill. The worst time to haul cattle is during a cold rain in the winter, which decreases the temperature on wet cattle, causing stress and sickness. Δ



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