European Food Safety Authority

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Advisory Forum and Advisory Forum Communications Working Group

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DRAFT PRESS RELEASE

EFSA assesses welfare risks to animals during transport

Scientists on the European Food Safety Authority's (EFSA) AHAW[1] Panel have made a number of recommendations based upon a thorough review of the most recent scientific literature from 2004 to date, following the framework of the current European legislation on the welfare of animals during transport. The Panel members set out indicators that veterinary inspectors and transport workers could use in assessing the welfare of transported animals. The experts also highlighted the need for further research, for example, on travelling times, space and the levels of temperature during transport.

The European Union in 2005 laid down provisions to protect the welfare of animals during transport[2]. EFSA's advice[3] will contribute to a report the European Commission is due to present in 2011 to the European Parliament and to the EU Member States on the impact of the 2005 regulation.

The opinion presents risks related to the transport of the following farm species: horses, pigs, sheep, goats, cattle, poultry, and rabbits. It outlines the level of risk related to various aspects of animal transport like the means of transport, transport practices and space requirements[4]. EFSA also gathered new scientific and technical data at a technical meeting in October 2010 with representatives from 22 organisations, including the transport industry, livestock breeders, and animal welfare non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

This opinion also lists a series of practical clinical measurements and observations, which can provide animal industry professionals with data to assess the welfare of animals during transport. For example, if, after inspecting an animal, a professional believes it is suffering from high body temperature or making abnormal respiratory sounds, s/he can use such measurements to justify a decision to declare the animal unfit for transport.

The experts also stress the need for further research on aspects such as: limits and regulation of temperatures during the transport of poultry and rabbits; the effect of ventilation on pigs;

[1] Panel on Animal health and welfare (AHAW)
[2] Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations, safeguards animal welfare during transport.
[3] EFSA published opinions on the welfare of some animal species during transport, and on temperature standards during transport respectively in March 2004, and October 2004.
[4] To provide policy makers with more user friendly advice, the opinion presents the level of risk in areas such as fitness e.g. suitability of the animals for transport, means of transport (road, rail, air or sea), transport practices (loading and unloading of animals, ventilation), watering and feeding intervals, journey times and resting periods, additional provisions for long journeys for some species, and space requirement (allowances). This structure follows the one of Annex I the 1/2005 Regulation.

the minimum space allowed for rabbits, pigs and newly-hatched chickens ; and the duration of the journey which will not harm unweaned horses, pigs and calves.

Scientific Opinion (link)
Meeting with stakeholders (link)

Detailed notes to editors:

The thorough review of the most recent scientific literature from 2004 to date indicates the following for the main farm species:

Cattle
Recent studies indicate that treating cattle in a humane way before transportation reduces the stress during transport. Studies also confirm that heat stress can present a major threat to cattle welfare, which can be prevented by providing ventilation systems in vessels when animals are transported by sea. Scientific evidence show that if adult cattle are transported on journeys longer than 29 hours, fatigue and aggressiveness increase. Reviewed studies show that cattle could recover from adverse effects if they are given water during rest periods on journeys of between 8 and 29 hours even when ventilation is good and space adequate. Experts say that more research is required to investigate the length of resting periods during the transport of cattle.

Poultry
Various studies indicate an ideal upper limit of 24-25°C, and a lower limit of 5°C for the temperature of containers used for transporting chickens raised for meat production (broilers). Scientific evidence indicates that the introduction of temperature limits in the transport of newly hatched chickens could have beneficial effects on the welfare of the birds. Experts encourage further research on ventilation. For journeys longer than four hours scientific studies show that vehicles equipped with mechanical ventilation can maintain satisfactory temperature levels, which ought to be monitored and recorded.

Pigs
New research confirms that pigs have difficulties in adapting to stressful situations. When grouped for transport, pigs kept in stable groups and without the presence of unfamiliar animals, have a reduced level of stress. Recent scientific studies indicate a higher risk of mortality when pigs are fed before transport, and highlight the need for water to be always available at the farm, and assembly points. Moreover, experts suggest carrying out research on how pigs respond to stress linked to fatigue, heat and cold.

Sheep
Since there is insufficient scientific evidence to determine maximum journey times for sheep, more emphasis should be given to the quality of the journey experienced by the animal. To reduce the risk of injury, aspects such as acceleration, braking, stopping, and uneven road surfaces should be monitored, in particular during long journeys.

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Goats

Scientific papers suggest that stress is minimised when goats are kept in stable groups, particularly during loading and unloading. Furthermore, repeated regrouping could lead to an increased level of aggression, as could the introduction of new animals, which should be monitored closely. Horned and hornless goats should be kept separate during transport to avoid injuries.

Horses

The reviewed scientific literature demonstrates that because of their different levels of aggression, horses should always be transported in individual stalls or pens, with the exception of foals which should be travelling with their mothers. Partitions have proven to be necessary not only to avoid overheating but also because horses find it relatively difficult to maintain their position during sudden vehicle movements. Experts recommend further scientific research on partition design for their transport.

Rabbits

Numerous scientific studies indicate that stress linked to temperature during transport can be detrimental to rabbits' welfare, and adequate ventilation during transport has to be ensured to maintain the inside temperature within a range of 5-20 °C. Experts also highlight the need for further research on the effects of temperature on rabbits during transport.

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