

# Assuring Quality and Welfare at Control Posts: a European Perspective

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## Abstract

In this paper various welfare aspects of long distance transport of animal are introduced. Scientific evidence is presented together with ethical and public concerns, as well as enforcement problems with examples from current practice and research. The on-going project on 'Renovation and promoting high quality control posts in the European Union' is presented as it foresees a significant improvement of the equipment as well as the management of 12 Control Posts (CPs) located at the cross roads of important flows of animals transported over long journeys in the EU. The aim is to conclude with a model to assure quality and welfare during all phases of long distance transport and mainly when animals are uploaded and housed at a control post.

**Keywords:** animal transport, control posts, quality assurance, welfare

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## 1. Introduction

The welfare of an individual is its state as regards its attempts to cope with its environment [1] and includes both the extent of failure to cope and the ease or difficulty in coping.

Long distance transport by road of live animals is associated with a wide variety of stressors, including heat and cold, hunger, thirst, humidity, overcrowding, mixing with unfamiliar animals, fatigue, motion sickness, noise and vibration, and inadequate ventilation. Such stressors often result in poor welfare, a state in which the efficiency of the body defense, including the immune system, can be compromised.

Key factors which can result in stress during animal handling and transport are: attitudes to animals and the need for training of staff; laws and retailers' codes; genetics especially selection for high productivity; rearing conditions and experience; the mixing of animals from different social groups; handling procedures; driving

methods; stocking density; increased susceptibility to disease and increased spread of disease [2,3,4].

Now days the long distance transport of animals is not only increasing significantly but is also changing in nature. What has made circumstances different in the 21st century is the nature of transport, the volume of traffic and a public awareness of welfare issues with demands that animals be treated humanely and in accordance with best contemporary practices. This increased volume of transport creates an unprecedented risk for disseminating infectious diseases, including those that may affect people [5].

According to Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 [6], Control Posts (CPs) aim at ensuring that resting animals during transport are kept in good welfare condition while maintaining their animal health status.

The aim of this paper is to introduce scientific evidence on long transport of animals by road with emphasis on animal welfare and quality issues at CPs. The ultimate purpose is to conclude with a model to assure quality and welfare during all phases of long distance transport and mainly when animals are uploaded and housed at a CP.

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## 2. Ethical and Public concerns

During the last decade, animal welfare during transport was the subject of debate, often based on emotional approaches. However, it is important that the economic, scientific and practical dimensions should be taken into account by legislative and executive bodies and the animal welfare movement.

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) has also consistently been opposed to long distance transport. The FVE position paper states: *“FVE has always been of the opinion that fattening of animals should take place within or near the place of birth. Animals should also be slaughtered as near the point of production as possible. The journey time for slaughter animals should never exceed the physiological needs of the animals for food, water or rest”* [2].

In March 2002, the European Commission’s Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) published a detailed report on the welfare of animals during transport. The report concludes that the welfare of animals unaccustomed to loading and transport is significantly poorer than normal during the first few hours after loading. There is then some degree of adaptation, but after a few hours of transport welfare tends to become poorer as journey length increases. The report stresses that *“Hence such animals should not be transported if this can be avoided and journeys should be as short as possible”*.

The 2004 Opinion of the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) on the welfare of animals during transport stated: *“A variety of stressors involved in transport are key factors that strongly contribute to poor welfare in transported animals and they also increase the susceptibility to infection of transported animals and the shedding of infectious agents in already infected animals. ...Transport should therefore be avoided wherever possible and journeys should be as short as possible”* [7].

In February 2008, Neil Parish MEP, Chairman of the European Parliament’s Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, stressed that the transport of live animals over long distances *“is not only cruel, but journeys of this distance are completely unnecessary. Slaughter should be carried out as locally as possible and meat*

*transported on the hook, rather than on the hoof. It’s time we ended the outdated and totally needless suffering”* [8].

Moreover, it is widely accepted that the training for any person handling animals has a significant effect on the ways in which people manage animals. People may hit animals and cause substantial pain and injury because of selfish financial considerations, or because they do not consider that the animals are subject to pain and stress due to the lack of knowledge about animals and their welfare [9].

Recent research has been carried out by a survey involving 364 animal trucking enterprises, located in Northern Italy. The results show that the participation in training courses appears very limited or lacking. The majority of the people interviewed (66.7%) stated they had not followed training courses on animal welfare and prior to animal transport approval. The remaining 33.3% attended training courses organised by local health authorities or trade associations [10].

## 3. Enforcement problems

In recent years, all EU institutions have contributed to raise welfare standards in the European Union based on the Protocol to the Amsterdam Treaty on Animal Welfare. The protection of animal welfare during transport is currently based on a new regulation since January 2007. The Regulation identifies the obligations of all those involved in animal transport and related operations and introduces new and more efficient monitoring tools and much stricter rules for long journeys, including a substantial upgrading of vehicle standards. Codes of practice, such retailer codes, can also have significant effects on animal welfare during transport. Regulation EC 1/2005 [6] has replaced Directive 91/628 [11] and amended Directives 64/432/EEC [12] and 93/119/EC [13] and Regulation 1255/97/EC [14]. The result is an increasing awareness of animal welfare during transport, not only by the public but also by the stakeholders. However, violations of existing animal transport legislation and animal welfare standards are reported very frequently within Europe. This might be explained by a lack of concern for animal welfare, but also by increasing costs related to improved protection of animals, which are not met especially in relation

to long distance journeys, representing less than 10% of the overall trade in live animals.

Due to lack of inadequate inspections and enforcement, there is little available data about accidents, infractions and imposed penalties. Despite lack of data, violations of animal transport standards evidently occur regularly, as shown by surveillance of animal transport vehicles by NGOs working for farm animal welfare during transport. Their findings provide evidence of violations of allowable driving times, dirty vehicles and rough handling of animals during loading, unloading and upon arrival at slaughter plants.

The following breaches of the legislation have been common for many years: deficient checks of journey logs; failure to give animals the rest, food and water; exceeding the permitted loading density; insufficient headroom; failure to provide water on the vehicle; the use of vehicles that fail to meet the legislative standards for journeys exceeding eight hours; the transport of unfit animals, and lack of certification for the drivers [15].

#### 4. The role of Control Posts

Each year around 6 million farm animals are transported on extremely long journeys across the EU or to or from third countries, some for slaughter, and others for further fattening. Many of these journeys, which involve extensive suffering, take over 30 hours; the worst take over 70 hours [16]. Since the adoption of Directive 95/29/EC [17] the transport of animals in the EU has been limited in time for the main farm species (horses, cattle, sheep, goats, poultry and pigs). After a certain period of transport by road (up to 29 hours for ruminants and 24 hours for horses and pigs) animals must be unloaded for 24 hours. To improve animal welfare on journeys longer than 24 or 29 hours, CPs have been developed to accommodate animals for rest, feed, and water. CPs, formerly referred to as staging points, are structures used to accommodate animals for rest, feed, and water after long distance transport. The animals are required to rest there for at least 24 hours before travelling further. Conditions, competence of staff working the posts, management and procedures at the control posts should guarantee that the animals transported continue their journey under optimum welfare conditions including compliance with animal-

health requirements. According to Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 [6], every control posts must:

(a) be located, designed, constructed and operated as to ensure sufficient bio-security preventing the spreading of serious infectious diseases to other holdings and between consecutive consignments of animals passing through these premises;

(b) be constructed, equipped and operated as to ensure that cleaning and disinfection procedures can be carried out. A lorry wash shall be provided on the spot. Such facilities must be operational under all weather conditions;

(c) be cleansed and disinfected before and after each use, as required by the official veterinarian.

Control Posts are establishments approved by the national Competent Authorities provided that they comply with the requirements laid down in Regulation (EC) No 1255/97 [14]. Rules laid down in this Regulation aim at ensuring that animals are kept in good welfare conditions while maintaining their animal health status. This has been a particular issue following the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak of 2001 where it was confirmed that contacts between animals of different origins at a control post led to the spreading of this disease.

Although their importance, according to recent information and opinion, CPs do not seem to meet the actual needs of transporters as control posts are missing in certain locations and a number of existing control posts are of poor quality standards despite official controls.

Moreover, animal welfare organisations have often pointed out that control posts are neglected by transporters and, when used, this is not for 24 hours (as required by the animal transport legislation, but for shorter periods, closer to EU social rules for drivers (i.e. +/-12 hours).

#### 5. Project SANCO/D5/2010/CRPA/SI2.578062

The project entitled '**Renovation and promoting high quality control posts in the European Union**' main objective is to plan and design building or the renovation of high quality CPs in order to set up a reference for the highest standards concerning the welfare of the animals for such establishment (<http://www.controlpost.eu>).

It foresees a significant improvement of the equipment as well as the management of 12 CPs

located at the cross roads of important flows of animals transported over long journeys in the EU. Considering that the Feasibility Study “Evaluation of the feasibility of a certification scheme for high quality control posts” [18] has counted 123 operative CPs this will mean that almost 10% of the CPs are directly interested by the action while 4 CPs are positioned on the transport roads of live animals to Russia.

Specific objectives of the action to be carried out are:

- » Planning, designing, financing the building and renovation of 12 CPs in order to set up a reference for the highest quality standards for such establishments;
- » Developing the standards aimed at the establishment of a pilot certification scheme for CPs with an adequate involvement of relevant stakeholders represented by an appointed advisory board.
- » The design of a quality certification system (CS), technically and economically viable, will enable the classification of CPs according to their degree of compliance with Animal Welfare (AW) standards and with high level of bio security;
- » The set up of a European wide on line booking service with detailed information concerning the CPs concerned;
- » The development of e-learning tools to provide information and awareness, targeted to drivers of transport companies, CP staff and official veterinary inspectors, on the practical ways they can improve the welfare of transported animals over long journeys;
- » The dissemination of the results of the action to the target groups by means of handbooks, maps, a dedicated website and an international stakeholder conference.

The project is coordinated by CRPA and the consortium of partners and third parties guarantees a geographical coverage of the project in ten Member States: Spain, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Greece, Denmark and Belgium. In these countries the majority of the EU CPs are located.

The actual design of CP renovation will be based on the outcomes of the Feasibility Study, the stakeholders’ consultation and the knowledge of the consortium partners regarding AW, bio security, work safety and economic and environmental sustainability.

The same knowledge base will serve as input for the contents of the handbook to be used by the companies engaged in managing CPs and in animal transport. Detailed information on the optimal outlay and possible improvements in equipment will be contained in the handbook, able to inform transport companies about a network of high quality CPs in the EU. For the transport companies, CP staff and veterinarians of the competent authority e-learning tools will be developed.

One of the main objectives of the project is to develop a pilot certification scheme for CPs in the EU.

Starting from the draft certification scheme reported in the Feasibility Study a science based certification scheme will be designed using the knowledge of the scientists working in this action and the results of the AW assessments and the key infrastructure parameters provided by other actions. The pilot scheme will be tested in five CPs.

Knowledge sources will be also the results of the Welfare Quality® project [19] and all other AW knowledge detained by the listed research institutes. Result of this consultation round will be a scientifically based certification scheme which in its turn will be discussed by the advisory board which will include representatives of breeding companies, farmers, transporters, live animal traders, meat industry, retailers and animal welfare organisations. The Certification Scheme will be tested in practice in a pilot on different CPs. The results of these pilots will be reported and discussed in a stakeholders’ consultation after which the final CS will be approved. Developments in views on the function and activities of CPs might lead to alterations in the CS in the future. Alterations, however, always have to be approved by the advisory board of stakeholders.

Once the certification scheme will be established a training programme will be set up for other certification bodies interested in the scheme. A training course for these interested certification bodies will be organised. The relevant documents of the certification scheme will be published on the website. Final action at this stage is the performance of 50 audits in 50 CPs. Within this procedure almost 50% of the operative CPs in the EU will be certified.

## 6. Conclusions

There is a need to develop a scheme for assuring quality and welfare during all phases of long distance transport and mainly when animals are unloaded and housed at a control post.

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