



Transport in Europe: Enforcement Problems

Briefing

Europe's trade

Each year around 6 million farm animals are transported huge distances across Europe. Many of these journeys, which involve extensive suffering, take 40 or 50 hours; some take over 70 hours.

Some of these animals are being transported for slaughter, others for further fattening. Much of the suffering that is inherent in long journeys could be prevented by substantially reducing journey times. Bearing this in mind, animals should be slaughtered as near as possible to the farm of rearing; the meat could then be transported to wherever it is wanted. Animals should also be fattened on or near the farm of birth. To convert these principles into practical reality, a maximum limit of 8 hours should be placed on journeys to slaughter or for further fattening.

The suffering involved

Animals are regularly packed into overcrowded trucks and are often given no, or far too little, food, water or rest. As the journeys progress, the animals become increasingly exhausted, dehydrated and stressed. Some get injured, suffering from painful problems such as lameness, broken legs, broken horns and broken pelvises.

Due to exhaustion or poor driving (sudden braking or acceleration or over-rapid cornering) some animals collapse on to the floor of the truck where they are in danger of being trampled by their companions.

Many journeys take place in blistering summer heat in severely overcrowded trucks with inadequate ventilation. Combined with water deprivation and the sheer length of the journeys, this leads to animals becoming utterly worn out; some succumb to heat stress and can be seen desperately panting and gasping for air. In the worst cases, many die.

Transport of unfit animals

The new film *Forbidden Journeys* focuses on one particularly serious problem: the transport of sick and injured cows and, in some cases, bulls. For two years Animals' Angels has been investigating the fate of dairy cows when, at the end of their working life, they are sent for slaughter. They found sick and injured cows, which should be euthanized, being forced to the abattoir so that they can enter the human food chain. This is a serious problem in several Member States; the film focuses on three countries: Spain, Italy and Portugal. Investigations with similar results have also been carried in the Netherlands, Poland and Germany. These journeys cause great suffering - and are illegal.

The transport of sick or injured animals was prohibited by Directive 91/628 on the protection of animals during transport. That prohibition has been tightened up by the new Regulation 1/2005 on the protection of animals

during transport and related operations. The Regulation stipulates that an animal is not fit for transport if it is "unable to move independently without pain or to walk unassisted".

The new film shows that examples of dairy cows that cannot stand up or walk have ropes or chains attached to a leg or their neck and are then dragged off the truck. Sometimes tractors are used to shove the wretched creatures on to the truck or across the slaughterhouse yard. This cruel treatment causes immense pain and distress.

Farmers and transporters ignore the law that prohibits the transport of ill and injured animals because they are determined to get them to the abattoir. The animals have a high value if they can be slaughtered in an abattoir. But if they are killed on the farm or at market they are worth nothing as their meat cannot enter the human food chain.

Animals' Angels investigators filming in Italy and Spain, Poland, Holland, Germany and Portugal in 2006 found injured cows regularly being transported in breach of the law. They returned in spring 2007 to Spain and in summer 2007 to Portugal where they found the same abuses continuing in both countries. Due to pressure from Animals' Angels and the media, however, the Spanish authorities have finally taken measures to stop the transport and abuse of downer cows at one Spanish slaughterhouse. It was here that chains were attached to the legs of cows that could not walk, in order to haul them, upside down, to the first floor."

Dairy cows are particularly vulnerable to becoming what are called 'downers' – animals that cannot get up or walk. They have been pushed to such high milk yields that many suffer from a range of serious welfare problems including a high incidence of lameness and mastitis, chronic hunger and digestive disorders.¹ The pressures on high yielding cows are so great that many are prematurely culled after just 2-3 lactations due to infertility, severe loss of body condition and utter exhaustion. Lameness, which is often extremely painful, is the most serious problem. Most surveys in Europe report that about 50% of dairy cows go lame in any one year and about 20% are lame at any one time.² This high level of lameness means that many are at risk of deteriorating during transport to the point where they cannot walk at all.

Other enforcement problems

In addition to the transport of unfit animals, many transporters have been ignoring other key aspects of the EU legislation and many Member States have been failing to enforce the law. This is evidenced by a whole raft of damning reports by the European Commission's Food and Veterinary Office as well as by reports by Animals' Angels, Compassion in World Farming and Eurogroup for Animals, all of whom have monitored the trade.

The following breaches of the legislation have been common for many years:

- deficient checks by the authorities in the Member State of departure. In some cases the authorities accept journey plans that show unrealistically short journey times with the result that the rest stops that are obligatory for long journeys are neither planned nor carried out.
- permitted loading density is exceeded. Overcrowding leads to heat stress and makes it impossible for animals to reach the water points on the truck.
- insufficient headroom
- failure to provide water on the vehicle
- failure to unload and provide rest, water and food mid-journey. Regulation 1/2005 (and previously Directive 91/628) provides that after 24 hours travel, pigs and horses must be unloaded and given 24 hours rest, food and water; the same applies to sheep and cattle after 29 hours travel. These requirements are regularly ignored on transports from Spain to Italy.
- trucks failing to meet the vehicle standards laid down by the legislation for journeys exceeding 8 hours
- transport of unfit animals.

¹ Webster J., 2005. Animal welfare: limping towards Eden. Blackwell Publishing, UK.

² As 1.

Enforcement failures on long journeys

A failure to enforce the legislation is common on many of Europe's main routes. Examples include:

Transports from Spain to Italy

Animals' Angels has monitored exports from Spain to Italy for slaughter over the last two years. Horses, pigs, sheep and cattle are all involved in this trade. Serious breaches of EU animal protection legislation occur routinely during these journeys. No attempt is made by the Spanish authorities to enforce this legislation. As a result animals are regularly transported for over 35 hours without any proper rest, food or water.

Transport of pigs from the Netherlands

The Netherlands exports 2 million pigs a year to Spain, Italy and Eastern Europe. Some are going for slaughter, but most are young pigs being sent for fattening. These long journeys often involve great suffering.

Earlier this year 190 piglets died during a journey from the Netherlands to southern Italy. Recently 13 Dutch piglets died on a journey to Spain. Moreover, a Dutch truck carrying piglets from Denmark to Italy only unloaded the piglets on board for a 12 hour rest instead of the required 24 hours. The drivers then falsified the documents, claiming that they had stopped for 24 hours.

Transport of lambs and horses from Eastern Europe for slaughter in Italy

Around 1.3 million lambs a year are sent from Hungary, Romania and Poland to Italy. Italy also imports around 60,000 horses a year for slaughter from Eastern Europe, mainly from Poland and Romania. EU legislation is frequently ignored during these long journeys. Many horses are visibly exhausted from their ordeal and injuries are common. The law that requires horses to be transported in single stalls is nearly always broken. Lambs are often transported in overcrowded trucks with insufficient headroom and are not given the rest, food and water required by EU legislation.

Transport of cattle from Ireland to Spain and Italy

Ireland exports around 100,000 cattle a year to Spain and Italy for fattening. Irish transporters often fail to unload the animals and rest them as required by EU legislation.

Call for action

Animals' Angels, Compassion in World Farming and Eurogroup for Animals believe these cruel practices must be ended. We call on the European Commission and the EU Member States:

- to set a legal limit on the time for which animals can be transported;
- to rigorously enforce the EU legislation on the protection of animals during transport;
- and in particular to enforce the prohibition on the transport of ill and injured animals.

Ends