

Nov 18/08

Coalition worried about cull dairy cattle condition

Dear editor:

This is an open letter to Ontario dairy farmers.

The Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals is concerned about the poor condition of some cull dairy cows at Ontario auction markets. Recent footage collected at Ontario markets shows lame and emaciated dairy cows.

This reflects poorly on all dairy farmers.

Producers should always assess whether a cow is fit to be transported and marketed. The Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals asks dairy farmers to put thought into the options and consider the cow's condition before deciding. Cows should be provided good veterinary care on the farm.

The best practice is to only ship cull cows while they are still fit for transport. Failing that, on-farm euthanasia or on-farm slaughter for family consumption with processing at a local abattoir are better options for lame, emaciated animals than the rigours of transport and auction.

Cows should be dried off before being shipped. Lactating cows are not milked at auction, causing the cow great discomfort. (Quebec cows with leaking udders at Ontario auctions pose a particular problem.)

A cow might be sold on a Tuesday, then shipped on Thursday, with transport taking seven days or more. As a result, animals in poor condition suffer and go down.

Most cull cows from Ontario are transported long distances for slaughter – to Quebec or the United States, including Wisconsin, Illinois or Pennsylvania.

With the current strong demand and good prices paid for cull cows, producers may be tempted to put an emaciated cow onto the truck when she should not be. Some cows should not be shipped under any circumstance.

Give thought to what is best for the cow.

It is in industry's best interest to put best practices forward rather than shipping liming, mastitis-infected, emaciated cows being seen at Ontario markets.

—*Stephanie Brown*

Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals