

Haul Responsibly

BQA Stock Trailer Transportation of Cattle guidelines can ensure your cattle make the trip safely.

by *Christy Couch Lee*

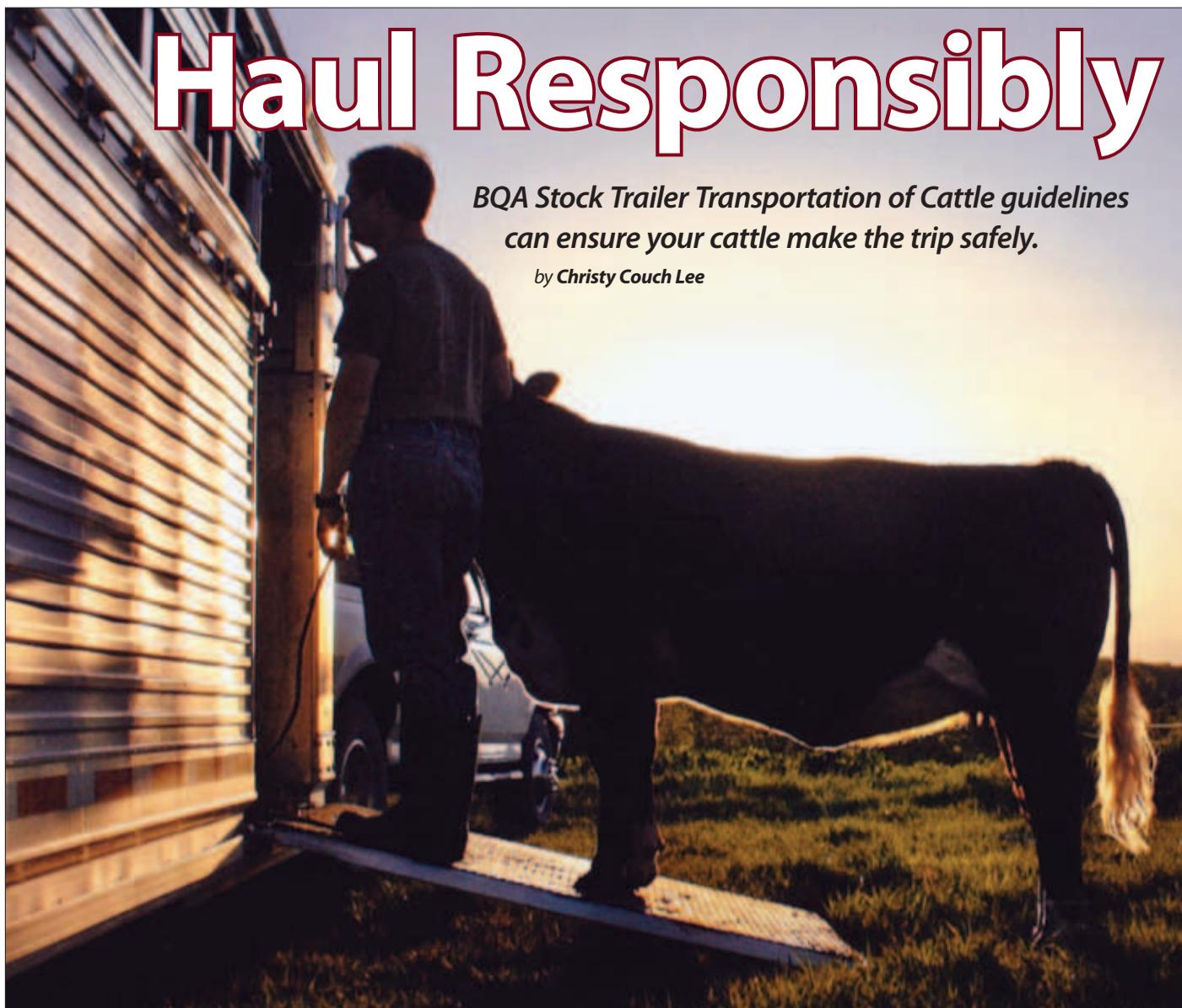


PHOTO BY JUSTIN MOSEY

capacity, equipment selections, and driving and weather considerations.

Maintain your trailer

Gill says trailer maintenance is a critical component of the stock trailer guidelines.

“The main thing, to me, is trailer inspection, because we use trailers so seldom in most operations that we don’t regularly inspect the flooring,” he says. “In addition, we don’t clean out the wood-bottomed floors like we should, and they can break through, injuring cattle.”

He says many cattlemen struggle with the concept of trailer inspection.

“It’s a change in thought processes to inspect tires, wiring, flooring and gate latches routinely,” he says. “Most of us don’t inspect until they’re broken.”

The guide also encourages producers to inspect tires, wheels and brakes routinely; to ensure a jack capable of lifting a loaded trailer is available; and to clean the trailer after each use for the safety of animals.

Load logically

Load density is also a critical component to stock trailer safety, Gill says.

“Everyone tries to get at least one more on the trailer than they should,” he says. “Squeezing one more animal on the trailer is not good for the cattle, the trailers or the people.”

Turner says the cost of an extra trip isn’t as great as the cost of losing an animal due to overloading.

“If a cow goes down and can’t get up, how much money have you lost?” he says. “In addition, you get decreased fuel mileage when your truck is overloaded and you’re putting excess strain on your vehicle.”

And, a cattlemen must also take care in loading the cattle onto the trailer. Gill says loading and unloading procedures are a critical issue that is often overlooked.

“If we force cattle onto a truck with hot shots or yelling, they won’t want to be on that trailer,” he says. “They’re always trying to get off. But, by using the proper facility design and handling techniques, the cattle will walk onto the trailer quietly and will haul much more calmly.”

And, lower stress leads to fewer problems with quality, Turner says.

“As stress increases, immune function is reduced,” he says. “This can lead to more illness and carcass defects, and result in lower profitability. If cattle are calm after loading, there will be fewer injuries and less bruising.”

Turner says it’s also critical to sort animals based on their age, size and horn presence.

“Don’t put a calf in with mature cattle, or it’s likely to get

It’s no secret. Proper handling of cattle can lead to fewer injuries and, ultimately, a higher quality product and increased revenue for your bottom line. And that’s exactly why the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) has released the Beef Quality AssuranceSM (BQA) Stock Trailer Transportation of Cattle guidelines.

Ronald Gill, professor and Extension livestock specialist with Texas AgriLife Extension, helped to develop the program

guidelines. He says this program serves as a follow-up to the BQA Master Cattle Transporting program.

“A few years ago, the Master Cattle Transporting program was designed to stress the importance of proper handling and loading procedures for semi-truck drivers handling livestock,” Gill says. “We then realized the shortcomings with the lack of transportation information for transporting cattle to the auction facilities — overloaded trailers and poor flooring.

We decided to concentrate on the stock trailer aspect.”

Jim Turner, assistant professor and western area Extension livestock specialist with North Carolina State University, was also involved with the development of the program.

“The majority of cattle are, at some point, on a stock trailer — from farm to market, or farm to farm,” Turner says. “We needed to think about how we could impact our industry by creating guidelines.”

Turner says the guide contains common-sense guidelines for the industry.

“None of this is really rocket science,” he says. “We, as cattlemen, just need to think about how we haul our cattle. We need to think about temperatures — not hauling during the hottest parts of the day in the summer or in extreme cold. We need to not overload our trailers. We need to do routine maintenance on our trailers. We need to take steps to be proactive and keep ourselves in a good light. When we have a mishap, it gives the industry a black eye.”

Officially launched last year, the stock trailer guidelines were developed to encourage cattlemen to practice proper trailer safety procedures, including trailer maintenance, loading and unloading procedures, loading

Recommended maximum number of cattle* for trailers of different lengths.**

| Trailer size (inside dimension) | Cattle weight, lbs. | | | | | | | Total weight *** |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| | 400 | 600 | 800 | 1,000 | 1,200 | 1,400 | 1,600 | |
| | Number of head | | | | | | | |
| 16 ft. x 6 ft. | 18 | 12 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 5 | <7,400 lb. |
| 18 ft. x 6 ft. | 21 | 14 | 10 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | <8,400 lb. |
| 20 ft. x 6 ft. | 23 | 15 | 12 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | <9,300 lb. |
| 24 ft. x 6 ft. | 28 | 18 | 14 | 11 | 9 | 8 | 7 | <11,100 lb. |
| 20 ft. x 7 ft. | 27 | 18 | 13 | 11 | 9 | 8 | 7 | <10,800 lb. |
| 24 ft. x 7 ft. | 32 | 22 | 16 | 13 | 11 | 9 | 8 | <13,000 lb. |
| 32 ft. x 7 ft. | 43 | 29 | 22 | 17 | 14 | 12 | 11 | <17,300 lb. |

* This chart represents the maximum number of polled/dehorned cattle for trailers of different lengths; when hauling horned/tipped cattle reduce the number of cattle by 5%.

** The number of cattle loaded during hot conditions should be reduced.

*** The maximum weight of cattle for each trailer size with these calculations. Do not exceed the Gross Vehicle Weight Rating for your truck and stock trailer.

hurt,” he says. “In addition, don’t put horned animals in the same trailer compartment with dehorned cattle, as they’ll use their horns to ensure they have plenty of room, crowding the rest.”

Turner also recommends only hauling bulls together if they have been in the same pasture — not only for their safety but also for the longevity of the trailer.

“I’d like to keep my trailer after hauling a load of bulls,” he says.

And, hauling a cow in the late stages of pregnancy is not recommended, Turner says.

“That’s not the best place to have a calf,” he says.

Easy to adopt

Gill says no concept in the guide is difficult for cattlemen to adopt — the guidelines simply require a change in mindset.

“Nothing is really difficult to do,” he says. “It all just requires a change of behavior. If you’re used to hauling 12 cows on your trailer and you really should only be hauling 11, it

can be difficult to not squeeze that last one on there.”

However, by following these guidelines, Gill says, quality of product should be maintained.

“By properly using these procedures, we can manage the shrink on these cattle,” Gill says. “If there’s stress on the trailer, or if you have trouble with

loading or handling, the cattle will shrink more, and that’s money out of your pocket. It’s hard to see, but it’s a significant, hidden loss in our industry.”

And, obviously, injury during hauling can lead to even greater losses, he says.

“Proper handling can also prevent the loss and crippling of livestock

and the rejection of down cattle,” Gill says.

To view or download the BQA Stock Trailer Transportation of Cattle training video, visit bqa.org/bqastocktrailertransportation.aspx. **HW**

Fit to load?

The following is a checklist included in the Beef Quality AssuranceSM Stock Trailer Transportation of Cattle guide, for assessing cattle to be in proper condition for hauling.

- Are cattle physically able to be loaded and unloaded several times?
- Can cattle walk normally, bearing weight on all four legs?
- Are any cattle suffering from advanced stages of health disorders such as cancer eye, open wounds, mastitis, emaciation, malnutrition, exhaustion or deformity?
- Can each animal keep up with the rest of the group?
- If cattle have been treated, has the withdrawal time passed?
- Are cattle completely blind?
- Do not haul female cattle that are in the late stages of pregnancy. **HW**

