

The Long Haul

American cattle haulers operate on borrowed time as pressure builds for passage of permanent livestock hauling legislation.

by Brooke Roberts



Time is ticking for lawmakers to settle the uncertain legislative future of livestock transportation. Each day, cattle are transported across the United States under a second exemption from laws governing all other transportation sectors. The livestock industry's exemption excludes livestock haulers from compliance with current commercial driving laws until the first of October.

In December 2017, new legislation issued from the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration holds truckers to strict "Hours of Service" limits and requires the installation of an electronic logging device (ELD) to monitor mileage. Truckers are required to turn on their ELDs after traveling out of a 150-mile radius of their loading

point and can drive a maximum of 11 hours before stopping for a mandatory 10-hour break.

National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) President Kevin Kester knows transporting livestock presents its own unique challenges. "Hauling livestock is inherently different than hauling products like paper towels or bottles of water," Kester says.

In an industry full of unpredictable elements — most

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notably time and animal welfare considerations — transporting live animals requires significantly more flexibility than current standards permit. Kester recognizes a need for specialized

legislation for the movement of livestock. "The current Hours of Service (HOS) rules for livestock hauling present big challenges for our industry and can often jeopardize the health and well-being of livestock," he says.

Prioritizing cattle welfare

For cattle producers, animal welfare and efficient delivery become top transportation priorities. David Trowbridge, manager of Gregory Feedlots Inc. in Tabor, Iowa, works with customers to coordinate transportation of cattle from more than 15 different states. Gregory Feedlots custom feeds more than 7,000 head of varied types of cattle from remote locations as far as south Florida and New York.

Gregory Feedlots' customers procure individual truck drivers to haul cattle to feedlots in Iowa. When cattle are ready to be marketed, Trowbridge arranges transportation from the feedlot

to the packing plant. Although he admits Gregory Feedlots is ideally positioned within a reasonable proximity of its packers, the feedlot manager says distance traveled does not change his priorities.

"Your primary concern is the safe and timely delivery of the cattle to the location that you're going," Trowbridge explains. "Whether you're going to go an hour away or 30 hours away."

The latest transportation laws throw a wrench into Trowbridge's priorities. "Electronic logging has made it very difficult for livestock haulers to do long hauls and get them done on a timely basis," he says. "These are cattle that would have to be unloaded into another facility where they could be exposed to other diseases or sit on a truck for 10 hours while it's not moving."

Unloading cattle from the truck during the driver's rest period might seem like a plausible option to provide cattle with



additional space, as well as feed and water during the driver's mandatory rest. Unfortunately, besides the risk of disease introduction from a foreign place, the physical loading and unloading of cattle from the truck carry downsides of their own.

Manager Bill Goehring of Keosauqua Sales Co., a livestock market in southeast Iowa, feels it is unwise to load cattle on and off of trailers more than once during transport. The stress of extra handling and new environments, coupled with potential decreases in carcass quality, makes unloading cattle during the driver's rest period humanely and economically unappealing for stockmen.

"[The cattle] are subjected to bruising, banging and everything that happens when you're moving them on and off the truck," Goehring says. "One time of that is enough."

Excessively handled cattle will likely upset packers as well. "[The packers] are going to call back if you have lame cattle, sore cattle, bruised cattle," Goehring notes. "They're going to be bitter about the way the cattle were handled."

The next potential solution for cattle care during mandatory driver rest periods is to leave them on the trailer. Yet, again, cattle welfare is put at risk.

"Live cattle simply can't be left unattended in a trailer — especially in very hot or cold weather — for extended periods of time," Kester says.

When hauling is necessary in hot weather, it is crucial to keep cattle moving to avoid overheating. In extremely cold conditions, Trowbridge says moving and offloading animals at a final location with shelter as quickly as possible is ideal.

"You're always concerned about the weather," Trowbridge says. "Once they're on the truck and the truck's moving, you don't really have that much concern about the cattle on the truck, as long as they get where they're going and get unloaded."

Producers consistently prioritize cattle welfare, whether on foot or on the highway. In order for the industry to maintain

the highest level of care for its livestock, mandatory driver rest periods are not a viable option for live cattle in transit.

Sharing the road

Even though the livestock industry desires flexibility for its drivers as a means of safeguarding animal welfare, this situation is still a "two-lane road." Lawmakers understand animal welfare concerns but place heavy emphasis on potential safety risks associated with permitting extra drive time for livestock haulers. Driver safety is a shared concern of lawmakers and stockmen, so it must be considered in a solution addressing the needs of all parties involved.

"It's a very complicated issue because you want to be safe — I don't want my kids to be out on the roads with truck drivers that aren't safe," Trowbridge acknowledges. "But I also know that in today's environment, animal welfare is a huge issue for the image of our industry and we can't be exposing our animals to any unusual circumstances that could jeopardize them."

Trowbridge and Goehring agree the livestock hauling industry's consistent safety record speaks volumes.

"Our livestock haulers are great haulers," Goehring says. "Guys who drive livestock trailers are, as a group, a more conscientious, safer set of drivers than you'd get in just a group of freight haulers."

Goehring believes common sense needs to be at the forefront of the issue. "More legislation doesn't always make the highways safer," he says. "A driver that gets sleepy and can't make it is obviously going to use some common sense and stop."

Looking for legislation

Thankfully, the NCBA, cattlemen and lawmakers seem to be moving toward a compromise in recently proposed legislation. Two bipartisan pieces of legislation have been introduced in the U.S. Senate, armed with potential solutions for the livestock transportation issue.

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Livestock hauling legislation faces the unique challenge of balancing driver safety and animal welfare.

Transportation wisdom

Tips for loading, hauling and receiving cattle from David Trowbridge, Gregory Feedlots, Inc. manager, and Bill Goehring, Keosauqua Sales Co. owner.

David's advice:

- **Be mindful of weight and space.** "You have to correctly load the cattle — weight wise and space wise — depending on the haul."
- **Remember temperature matters.** "When it's warm — you're either going to load in the mornings or you're going to load in the evenings. You're not going to handle the cattle during the heat of the day."
- **Consider seasonal influence.** "In the winter time, we try to load the cattle in the mornings so they're not in transportation — especially fat cattle — during the night. The cattle will handle it better during that time instead of standing on a truck when its twenty below zero."
- **Always adjust.** "Every day you modify what you're doing as far as cattle welfare just because every day is a little bit different."
- **Minimize handling and lag time.** "As far as loading cattle, we want to bring cattle directly from the pen and directly onto the truck with as little handling and as little standing around time as possible."
- **Feed and water upon arrival.** "Those cattle that are unloaded go directly into receiving pens where they have access to water and feed — some long stem hay is what we'll put in our receiving pens, just so those cattle have something to fill their belly up and can drink some water."

Bill's recommendations:

- **Water as soon as possible.** "Get them to their destination and get them unloaded and settled so they can get a drink."
- **Do not overfeed.** "[Cattle] don't need to be hauled when they're full of hay and water. That upsets their digestive system and makes it hard for them to get started when they get to the other end."
- **Be conscious of your body language.** "You have to be conscious that you're safe in handling and efficient in loading and unloading. We try to keep everybody fairly calm here loading, and the cattle usually do better both coming on and off the trailers."
- **Be smart.** "People that are moving stock just need to use common sense." **HW**



PHOTO BY JONATHAN JOHANSEN





With more than 14 million cattle on feed in the United States, demand for livestock transportation remains high.

First, the Transporting Livestock Across America Safely (TLAAS) Act has been introduced in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The NCBA applauds this legislation for its comprehensive consideration of animal welfare, livestock haulers' well-being and the safety of all drivers on the roads. The TLAAS Act allows additional drive time for livestock haulers, permits drivers the flexibility

to rest as needed during their trip, without counting against their HOS time, and allows an additional 150-mile exemption on the back of a haul to accommodate for unloading times. Kester speaks favorably of the TLAAS Act.

"Given the unique nature of livestock hauling — often very long distances between cow-calf operations and feedlots or processing facilities — and the fact that we're transporting live

animals that must be treated humanely — this legislation is vitally important," he says. "I think it strikes a balance coupled with common sense for everybody involved."

Additionally, the Modernizing Agricultural Transportation Act, introduced in the Senate in June, requires the Secretary of the USDOT to create a working group intended to address the use of ELDs and implementation of excessively strict hours of

service regulations. Livestock haulers would remain exempt from current legislation until the working-group outcomes are formally proposed.

The NCBA is glad to have a second piece of bipartisan legislation introduced and looks forward to continuing to work toward a solution to current transportation concerns. Of course, the entire livestock industry is hoping for a legislative solution to emerge prior to October 1, the expiration date of the livestock haulers' exemption from current transportation law.

Livestock haulers, cow-calf producers, cattle marketers, feeders and packers are eagerly anticipating logical legislation to regulate livestock transportation. Due to the high priority of the issue and the expiring exemption, the industry hopes to see action soon. As Trowbridge says, "It's very, very important to the industry to get something settled." **HW**

Editor's Note: The most current livestock hauling legislation information and progress can be found at Beefusa.org.