

THE PERSONNEL TRAINING AN IMPORTANT STEP ON RAISING ANIMAL WELFARE DURING TRANSPORT

Ioana ANDRONIE, Monica PÂRVU, Viorel ANDRONIE, Adina CIUREA

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Spiru Haret University

ioanaandronie@yahoo.com

Abstract

Short or long distance of animal transport done often in poor conditions can affect the welfare and health of animals. The EU and national legislation in the field introduces more efficient rules to reducing the animal suffering during transport. The European Parliament resolution on the protection of animals during transport showed that current legislation has brought improvements in this area but it is still far from satisfactory especially in terms of time journey in relation with travel conditions (means of transport construction, microclimate, and methods of loading/unloading, supplies of food and water, stop for watering, feeding and rest).

The purpose of the study was to establish how the application of EU and national legislation has contributed or not to increase the animal welfare during transport in our country. This study was based on answers given by drivers and attendants (n: 840 participants) of animals involved in transport to some questions in the field. Results showed that livestock transporters lined to current legislation requirements thus ensuring the protection and animal welfare. This was due both to properly equipping vehicles, especially long-term transport, and training of the drivers and attendants of animals in order to obtain the certificate of competence.

The lack of knowledge regarding animal welfare during transport for all those involved in this topic – farmer, stockman, driver and attendant – may lead to a low level of welfare in animals transport.

Key-words: *animal welfare, training, transport legislation.*

Introduction

Road livestock transport is performed on a large scale both within the European area and outside its borders with major impact on animal welfare. Existing statistics have showed a significant increase in number of animals transported on European territory between 2005 and 2009. Thus pig transports increased by 70%, cattle transports increased by 8%, while sheep by 3%; only horse transports

decreased by 17 %. Two thirds of the animals transported were the subject of short term transportation – less than eight hours, while 4 % of transports had duration longer than the maximum period allowed, requiring mandatory breaks [1].

Animals are subject to a large number of stress factors during transport, generated by all the entities involved in the transport process ranging from animal handling method, means of transport, their microclimate, fodder and water access during transport, etc. All these factors may influence animal welfare level which may be assessed using different measurements amongst which: injury and infectious diseases incidence, animal behaviour, immunosuppression and physiological modifications [2], [3].

Drafting and application of European legislation regarding animal protection during transport in the past years as well as related operations and national legislation had the purpose to increase animal welfare level during transport.

Material and method

The study recorded the answers from drivers and transport attendants (n: 840 participants), who filled out a questionnaire at the same time with their attending the training programs to renew their Professional Competence Certificate. These participants are employed by transport companies which have livestock transport as their object of activity; animals are transported via vehicles. The training programs have been attended in the past five years by more than 4200 drivers and transport attendants.

According to European and national legislation both drivers and transport attendants must have a professional competence certificate which is mandatory in Romania as of January the 5th 2008, is valid five years and will be issued following graduation of a professional training in the area of livestock transport according to SVNAFS Ordinance [4]-[6]. The training curricula were designed based on European Council's Regulations, regarding animal protection during transport and other related activities [6].

In order to establish the manner in which application of current legislation regarding animal protection during transport has led to an improvement to animal welfare, drivers and transport attendants employed to transport livestock by means of road vehicles completed a 28 item questionnaire. Among others, the questions referred to: usefulness of knowledge acquired following training participation, means of transport characteristics, distance travelled, loading surface, injury and mortality rate upon arrival at destination, unloading time and traffic inspections.

Data obtained were statistically processed (ANOVA) and thus we were able to highlight the efficiency in applying current legislation and regulations on animal welfare during transport.

Results and discussions

The requirement of animal transportation that has resulted from the answers given by the participants was on average of 63.45% for chickens, 16.5% for pigs, 18.8% for cattle and sheep and 1.25% for other species (Fig. 1).

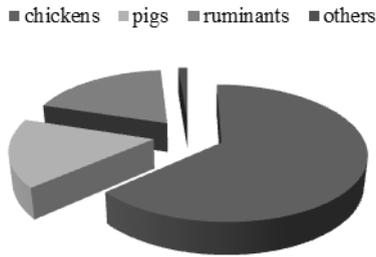


Fig.1. *The proportion of species transported (%) resulting from the study*

Following completion of questionnaires, we have concluded that the majority of journey during study time were short term (71.32 %), while the long term represented 28.68 % and were achieved both across Europe and to non-European countries.

The vehicles used during animal transport fulfilled the necessary physiological conditions required by the animals transported, both for long and short duration transport, as many of them were replaced or improved compared to the period prior to the study (Fig. 2).

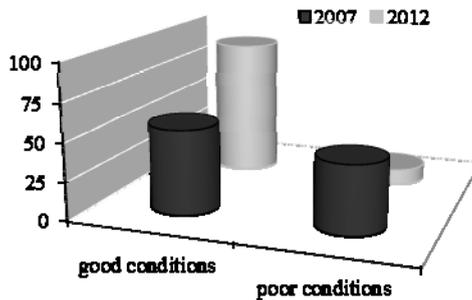


Fig. 2. *Ensuring the transport conditions for transported animals (%) in the short transport*

Moreover, in the long transport road vehicles were equipped with temperature monitoring and recording systems, artificial ventilation system and appropriate navigation system Global Positioning System (GPS).

Most of law breaches reported in long transport over the time were: the transport of unfit animals; the ceiling height; exceeding the loading density; failure to provide water on the vehicle; the use of vehicles that fail to meet the legislative standards [7].

Animal welfare during transport was ensured by abiding by legislative norms and requirements, fact rendered visible by the answers rate related to animal loading surface. This was ensured in short term transport (Fig. 3) to the maximum

for 63.8% of the animals transported ($p \geq 0.05$); to the minimum for 32.6% of the animals transported while for 3.6% of the animals transported this was not ensured ($p \leq 0.05$).

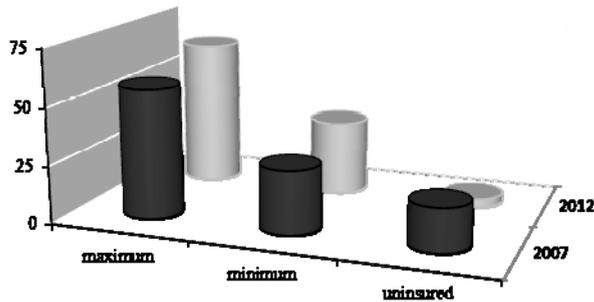


Fig. 3. The loading surface variation in short transport (%) before 2007 and after five years application of current legislation

The study results have shown an improvement in ensuring the appropriate loading surface to the animals transported compared to the period prior to implementing the specific legislation and drivers' participation in the professional training programs, due to the fact that they understood and became aware of the importance of ensuring this surface which may influence animal welfare during transport.

In our study, during the period when the Regulations were applied animal welfare level has improved considerably with respect to: transport means, ensuring loading surface, travel duration and environmental conditions.

As a result of the knowledge acquired, 81,3% of respondents answered affirmatively the question related to the decrease in animal injury and mortality rate upon arrival at destination thus confirming once more the importance of attending the programmes. Many of the participants by the answers given have confirmed that they have understood the impact of transport on animal welfare.

We have considered as extremely important the answer of 92% of the participants, who stated that these trainings have been useful for their activity from then onwards while only 8% of the participants have declared that the trainings did not help them in any way ($p \leq 0.001$).

Zanardi *et al.* (2007) have showed that the poor welfare is often due to lack of education, which has also resulted from our study. The animal transportation may have significant consequences regarding animal welfare, that ranging from pain, restlessness and fear to high levels of stress, due to a difference in attitude towards animals from the stakeholder – from farmer, Transport Company, driver, to those that handle the animals. Most of the times this happens due to lack of knowledge regarding the characteristics of transport means, loading surface, loading methods, all the more reasons to train all parties involved.

Conclusions

Our study showed that it is equally important the person that handles animals during loading/unloading to be trained to guarantee a high level of animal welfare.

Also the codes of good practice in this topic can have significant effects on animal welfare during transport.

Although mandatory by applicable current legislation, organizing the programmes to train drivers and transport attendants proved to be a necessity in order to ensure animal welfare during transport.

Both in the case of drivers and that of other people involved lack of knowledge regarding animal protection and welfare during transport may lead to a low level of welfare in animals transported, due to their behavior in traffic, together with other transport or transporter related causes.

To guarantee a high level of animal welfare during transport it is as important training the persons that handle animals during loading/unloading.

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