

Foreword – welfare aspects of the long distance transportation of animals

The long distance transport of animals within countries, between countries, across regions and across continents is increasing significantly and is also changing in nature. Statistics from the International Trade Centre of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the World Trade Organization show that the value of world trade in live animals soared from US\$8.7 billion in 2000 to US\$12.1 billion in 2005. This enormous figure would be even greater if zoo animals, wildlife and illicit traffic were included.

The history of animal transportation goes back thousands of years. It remains a legitimate practice to this day provided proper measures are taken to protect animal well-being and health. What has made circumstances different in the 21st century is the nature of transport (land, sea and air), the volume of traffic and a public awareness of welfare issues with demands that animals be treated humanely and in accordance with best contemporary practices. This increased volume of transport creates an unprecedented risk for disseminating infectious diseases, including those that may affect people.

Key public concerns about animal welfare relate to factors such as a lack of infrastructure and investment in training, research and standards development, as well as indifference and neglect. The live animal transportation industries are threatened when these deficiencies are not corrected.

Fortunately, a number of countries foresaw these problems and introduced a series of activities to support good animal welfare practices. Many recognised the clear connection between animal welfare, health and husbandry practice, and established policy settings to include these activities under a veterinary public and animal health umbrella. Recognising its critical importance, the World Organisation for Animal Health (*Office International des Épizooties*: OIE) in its IVth Strategic plan (points a to b), identified animal welfare as a key issue and launched a number of initiatives, such as the development of internationally agreed animal welfare guidelines to inform countries, industries and the public at large on best practice. The resulting OIE guidelines for the transport of animals by sea and land have provided the necessary reference point for further progress.

This issue of *Veterinaria Italiana* deals with livestock transportation. It is not a collation of scientific articles on the subject *per se*. Rather, its uniqueness derives from the fact that it provides advice and guidance on practical measures to improve approaches based on analyses of the science. Policy makers, risk analysts, regulators, quality managers, engineers and educators will gain greatly from this edition, which will serve as a key reference document on the subject.

The role of veterinarians and veterinary services in providing leadership and guidance on animal welfare, health and husbandry is fundamental and must not be undervalued. They have a fundamental responsibility to be involved in these issues and, when allied to the range of additional skills they possess, can ‘make a difference’ in supporting continuing improvements to animal welfare and health.

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