

Management of cull dairy cows: consensus of an expert consultation in Canada*Jane Stojkov and David Fraser**The University of British Columbia, Faculty of Land and Food Systems, Animal Welfare Program, Canada; j.stojkov@alumni.ubc.ca*

Management of cull dairy cows is a significant animal welfare challenge that has received little systematic attention in practice, policy and research. Dairy cows are continually removed from dairy herds and many are culled because of health issues. Because the market for these animals is specialized, cows with compromised health may be transported significant distances to slaughter and loaded and unloaded several times. The objectives of this study were to describe the diverse management of cull dairy cows in Canada and develop consensus for future actions, policy and research. Lacking quantitative research, a qualitative methodology was used. A two-day expert consultation was convened, involving farmers, veterinarians, regulators, animal transport, livestock auction and slaughter sectors. Participants (n=15) were recruited through 'key informants', and discussed provincial management practices of cull cattle, related risk factors, animal welfare problems and recommendations. The meeting was audio-recorded and used to extract descriptive data on cull cattle management and identify points of agreement. The results indicated significant differences in management practices between provinces, long transport distances in some cases (Newfoundland to Ontario – roughly 3,000 km), multiple handling events at livestock auctions, and dealer networks involved in multiple sales which increased the time from farm to slaughter (7-10 days). Nine consensus points were reached: (1) to gather information on travel times from farm to slaughter; (2) to increase awareness among producers and herd veterinarians of potential travel distances and delays; (3) to promote proactive culling; (4) to improve the ability of personnel to assess animals' condition and fitness for transport; (5) to identify local options for slaughter; (6) to investigate different management options such as on-farm slaughter; (7) to ensure that farms and auctions have personnel trained and equipped for euthanasia; (8) to promote cooperation among enforcement agencies; and (9) to eliminate certain forms of unnecessary handling.