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Management of cull dairy cows before and during transport has major welfare implications

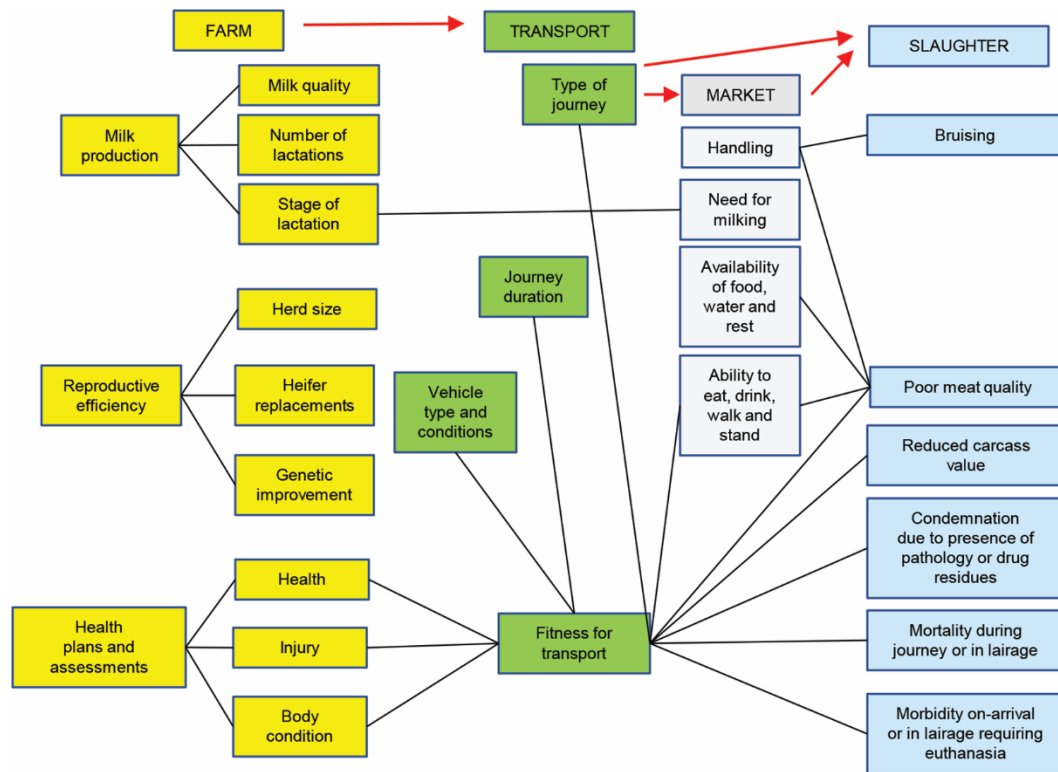
Effects of on-farm management of cull dairy cows and identifying areas for future research are in a new review in *Applied Animal Science*

Champaign, IL, June 14, 2021—Serious welfare problems happen when some cull dairy cows that are not suited for the intended transport are sent for slaughter. A [review](#) in [Applied Animal Science](#) notes that these problems are even worse if compromised cows are taken to slaughter through auction yards. The management decision to send a cull cow to slaughter must be made before the cow becomes unsuitable for transport.

To examine these effects, author Michael S. Cockram, Chair in Animal Welfare, Atlantic Veterinary College, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, Canada, analyzed and described the animal welfare problems that can occur when cull dairy cows are sent for slaughter, circumstances that can influence the incidence and severity of these problems and how they are correlated with management on the farm of origin, ways to minimize these problems, and suggestions to advance the welfare of cull dairy cows.

“Dairy producers need to understand the welfare implications of how they manage their cull dairy cows, and if the welfare of cull cows is to be improved, some need to change their management practices,” Cockram said. “Research on how dairy producers incorporate the welfare implications of their actions in their management of cull cows and how to increase their use of industry recommendations on the care of cull cows is a priority.”

There are major issues related to the fitness of cull dairy cows for transport, such as lameness, disease, injury, and poor body condition. During marketing and transportation, additional circumstances that affect the possibility of suffering include udder distention, handling that causes bruising, prolonged marketing route, and potential for inadequate feed intake. “Further research on the assessment of the fitness of cull dairy cows for transport and on the factors that influence their welfare during transport and marketing is required,” added Cockram.



Caption: Potential production, health, welfare, and food-safety issues that can influence culling decisions and the choice of marketing route when dairy cows are transported to slaughter (Credit: M. S. Cockram).

The reasons for sending unfit cows to slaughter include a lack of understanding of the welfare consequences; inadequate monetary penalties, legal regulations, and financial alternatives; and inadequate evaluation of fitness for transport. There is a need to develop on-farm management plans that include prompt diagnosis and treatment of common diseases. David K. Beede, PhD, editor in chief of *Applied Animal Science*, noted, “Proper welfare of cull dairy cows in many commercial dairy farms remains a challenge.” Welfare of cull dairy cows is thoroughly examined in this invited review.

The article appears in the June issue of *Applied Animal Science*.

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Notes for Editors

“Invited Review: The welfare of cull dairy cows” by Michael S. Cockram (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15232/aas.2021-02145>), *Applied Animal Science*, Volume 37, Issue 3 (June 2021), published by Fass Inc. and Elsevier Inc.

This article is openly available at <https://doi.org/10.15232/aas.2021-02145>.

Full text of the article is available to credentialed journalists upon request; contact Brittany Morstatter at +1-217-356-3182 ext. 143 or arpas@assochoq.org to obtain copies. To schedule an interview with the author, please contact Michael S. Cockram at mcockram@upei.ca.

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