

The welfare implications of the transport of pigs: The scientific background of current international transport duration standards

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A review was conducted of current Canadian recommendations and regulations on pig welfare during transport. Canadian standards were compared with international standards and current scientific literature. Focusing on journey duration during transport, we limited our comparison to the US, EU, UK, Ireland, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. The current Canadian Health of Animals Act and the 2001 Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals—Transportation recommend pigs not be confined without food, water and rest for longer than 36 h; afterwards, pigs must be given at least 5 h to feed, drink, and rest. Amongst international regulations and guidelines reviewed, a consensus exists on key points, including: (1) loading and unloading is extremely stressful, (2) transported pigs have a feed and water requirement, and (3) transport duration may depend on transport vehicle type (e.g., basic vs. “higher standard”). Overall, physiological data does not support transporting pigs prior to slaughter and short journeys may be more detrimental than longer journeys. Instead, keeping animals on transport vehicles with continuous access to water, proper dung removal, and adequate space to rest have found more support. The scientific literature demonstrates transport can be prolonged up to 24 h, provided transport conditions are good and water is available on the transport vehicle. Current EU transport duration guidelines are determined by the type of vehicle and whether it is “basic” or “higher standard”.

Thus, similar guidelines may be advisable in Canada in which animals transported short distances (e.g., 8 h or less) can be transported without food or water in “basic” vehicles; however, for longer transport durations (e.g., up to 24 h) pigs must be transported on “higher standard” vehicles.