

A Trucker's Experience – What Works

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■ Introduction

The hog industry has been evolving and changing through the years and we are privileged to be a part of this progressive industry. Heightened awareness in biosecurity and the humane handling of livestock has resulted in changes among feed manufacturing, genetics, transportation and all businesses related to hog production.

In the 1990s, Western Canada's agriculture sector experienced a variety of changes including the elimination of railway subsidies for grain farmers, a low Canadian Dollar, as well as diversified marketing options becoming available for the first time for hog producers. This paved the way for incredible growth for the hog industry and subsequently the opportunity for growth in the livestock transportation sector through market hog shipments within Canada, internal movements as well as feeder pigs, iso-weans, breeding stock, and market hogs being exported to the US and Mexico.

This paper will highlight some of our experiences with the transportation of livestock, underscoring our commitment to providing safe and humane transportation in a biosecure environment to help facilitate the highest profitability for our customers. We will present some of the areas where our company has experienced success through innovative ideas presented and established in the industry over the last 20 years in business.

■ Innovation

Collectively, we must present positive innovative solutions to ensure that all groups including consumers, hog producers, processing plants, as well as animal rights activists, understand that humane animal handling is both a priority and a reality within the hog industry.

Animal Wellbeing

Part of making things work, includes finding positive solutions to the variety of challenges that the industry faces. Our company is a leader in the industry by working together with government agencies to initiate positive change. We've worked closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in developing acceptable trailer stocking densities. These are used nation wide to ensure comfortable conditions for livestock during transport. More recently, we have developed a formula to use as a guideline in the number of market hogs, feeder pigs, and iso-weans, using the length of trip, temperature, and humidity to calculate stocking density for recommended pounds per square foot.

Steve's Livestock along with other industry leaders has been instrumental in developing an emergency response unit. Qualified members of our team are on call and ready to respond in the event of a traffic emergency dealing with pigs or cattle within Manitoba. This unit includes all the tools and equipment needed to promptly respond in the event of an emergency. The team is TQA certified and qualified to deal with stressed and injured animals.

Traceability

The outbreaks of BSE in the cattle industry have caused questions on where animals in the food chain were born, raised, and slaughtered. There are government and consumer-led initiatives to ensure food safety along with the ability to trace a specific animal in the event of disease outbreaks. The importance of this issue was recently confirmed for us when there was concern of a foot and mouth outbreak on a load of slaughter hogs originating in Canada being delivered to a processing plant in the US. We are currently in the midst of a test pilot project with Manitoba Pork Council in determining traceability of hogs from nursery barns to finisher barns and from finisher barns to packer and cull marketing locations.

Transportation

Steve's Livestock was built on the philosophy of "where there's a will, there's a way" and as such are constantly looking for new ways to improve in all areas of our companies in order to serve our customers more effectively and efficiently. Our progressive thinking has led to some of the most innovative facilities, equipment and protocols in the industry as well as developing environmentally responsible waste management practices.

Facilities

Our state of the art drying facility is located on our separate quarantine site away from the wash facilities and dirty trailers. It has been designed with a number of unique features including an 18" sloped floor to allow the water to

drain from the trailer. This helps to reduce drying time which translates into a more cost effective procedure.

The innovative design includes a solution for humidity control as well as the added benefit of conserving energy. At the beginning of the trailer drying process, the humidity in the dry bay is high. Aeration fans in the air mixing room are activated along with one exhaust fan at the opposite end of the building. When humidity levels reach a predetermined level, the humidistat automatically activates three things:

- an additional exhaust fan,
- the heating unit, and
- the fresh air intake.

The fresh air drops into the air mixing room and is heated prior to being forced into the trailer thru the aeration fans. Once the humidity drops the humidistat reverses the cycle. The heater is turned off, the fresh air damper is closed, and one of the exhaust fans is shut down. This allows for the preheated air to be recycled within the building as opposed to being wasted. This system allows our heating costs to be more efficient by reducing natural gas consumption.

We have also been leading the transportation industry through installation of air make up units in all our wash bays. In the winter months, these units are able to provide climate control to eliminate fog buildup in the facility allowing the wash bay personnel to see clearly. This provides improved working environments for our staff as well as ensuring that consistent quality washes are produced.

Equipment

Steve Brandt, CEO of the company, has pioneered various design elements to improve humane biosecure transportation of livestock together with trailer manufacturers. In the early years, equipment was modified onsite to exceed customer expectations and ensure the safety of the animals' en-route to their destinations. Safety was improved through the extension of ramps to reduce the percentage of slope, and we reduced the height of ramp cleat spacing. We've worked together with the manufacturing sector to seal any open tubes or crevices to eliminate packing of debris that could not be properly cleaned. This in turn has allowed washing to remain cost effective by reducing washing time while remaining biosecure.

Changes in design are most effective when initiated by those using the equipment. Quad deck trailers were previously used primarily to haul sheep as well as limited numbers of pigs for a few farms in the southern US who had high ramps to accommodate quad trailers. Steve's Livestock initiated the

design modification of the quad deck trailer to now load all four levels from one 4 foot loading dock. This design modification resulted in the ability to load more animals per trailer resulting in a huge benefit to the hog industry by reducing the per pig transportation cost for the producer.

Protocols

In an effort to increase biosecurity, the hog industry was beginning to request down time for the equipment. This began to be a costly endeavor for both the transportation industry as well as the producer. As a trucking company, we began working together with a group of veterinarians lead by Dr. Mike Sheridan to research this philosophy. This triggered a study testing the trailers in 12 hour increments to determine when the trailer is in fact the most free of bacteria. Results indicated that biosecurity was at its highest level immediately following the washing procedure. As a result, many genetic companies were able to experience a cost savings by reducing or completely eliminating down time.

In 2006, construction was completed on a segregated high health wash bay and lunch room facility as well as the dry bay and quarantine yard. Strict guidelines and procedures are in place for all employees to follow ensuring bio-security protocols are met. Traffic flow of all employees, veterinarians, and service personnel are posted and monitored. Our on-staff director of quality control monitors all procedures to ensure security measures are adhered to.

We have also developed and implemented the WISE (Wash, Inspect, Sample and Examine results) system for all our wash bays. Data is compiled, recorded and analyzed in order to facilitate accountability in following biosecurity protocols and ensure that our wash processes are followed.

Environmentally responsible

Washing trailers presents the issue of waste management. We have been innovative in this area by developing a unique separation system for dealing with effluent solids and liquids. All water and debris from our wash bays flows into the separation system which has no mechanical components but rather is operated solely by gravity flow. We end up with a dewatered product which is removed using pay loaders and gravel trailers to haul away the solids for use as fertilizer for cropland.

■ Biosecurity

Because our business is primarily serving the pork industry, the objective to eliminate disease outbreaks is something that we have worked hard to

promote within our own industry. As previously outlined in this paper, we have been proactive in introducing new protocols to increase high health washes and reduce the risk of disease transfer. Our director of quality control constantly reviews and upgrades protocols to meet and exceed the needs of our customers and the livestock industry as a whole.

Protocols

Protocols have been implemented where employees must adhere to strict procedures, including: washing and disinfecting of wash suits, boots, mats, storage boxes, boots and animal handling tools. Wash bay employees' clothing is kept separated and all staff must adhere to the biosecurity standards posted.

No trailers containing livestock are allowed on the SLT yard, Bison View Trailers site or any of the wash bay locations. Trailers must be scraped off site as well. Separate bedding trailers are located on the quarantine yard and we also ensure that the straw used for bedding has been baled on land where no hog manure is spread.

The trailer washing inspection process has been standardized and includes a checklist that must be completed by the shift supervisor. Failed inspections result in the trailer being washed a second time and re-inspected. Supplementary spot checks are completed by the wash bay management on a minimum of 20% of all complete washes.

Additional measures are taken to ensure trailers are thoroughly cleaned. We developed a testing system through consultations with veterinarians Dr. Mike Sheridan and Dr. Brad Chappell from Sheridan Heuser Provis as well as Gopi Nayer from the Winnipeg Veterinary Laboratory. Culture samples are taken on a weekly basis from different areas of the inside of a trailer. These samples are submitted to the Winnipeg lab for bacteriology. This process allows us to maintain an overview of the effectiveness of our wash procedures and collect data to assess our wash process as a whole.

Veterinary Inspected (VI) Trailers

Customers are able to request a Veterinary Inspected wash. The trailer undergoes the complete washing procedure followed by a thorough inspection performed by an independent veterinary firm. If the wash passes the examination, all the doors on the trailer are sealed and the paperwork is completed indicating whom it was inspected by. If the wash does not pass the inspection, it is sent back to be washed a second time and re-inspected. This information is recorded and passed on to the customer.

Training

All wash bay employees go through orientation which includes the wash bay training video outlining the biosecurity procedures that must be followed.

Each employee is responsible for a specific task to confirm quality washing is completed and staff is accountable for any breaches in biosecurity. All employees for both the wash bay, as well as drivers, cannot reside on a hog farm.

All new drivers go through a 3 day orientation program which includes extensive training on biosecurity measures that are required, as well as, the procedures to follow all necessary protocols. Emphasis is given to educating the drivers on the logic behind biosecurity to enable each individual to understand how far reaching repercussions of a simple mistake or misinterpretation can be. The expectation is that drivers will communicate potential security breaches in order to prevent disastrous results. Attention to detail is encouraged in all situations, however, primarily in prevention of contact with potentially harmful viruses and bacteria transferred in a variety of ways.

We also have a full time driver trainer on staff to assist driver services in determining that a driver possesses the necessary qualities and skills required to haul the different classes of livestock. The driver's pay scale corresponds to the type of loads he is qualified and able to haul. Each driver is cleared after receiving supplemental training in this respective order:

- slaughter animals
- cattle loads
- feeder pigs
- iso-weans and breeding stock

On site repair facility

All of our trailers are serviced at our on site repair facility, Bison View Trailers, to allow us to control what goes in and out of the repair shop. There is communication between dispatch, the repair shop and wash bay to ensure proper protocols are followed.

■ Humane Transportation of Livestock

Humane handling of livestock has been a part of Steve's Livestock mission statement since its inception. These contributions as a leader in the industry were recognized in 2003 upon presentation of the Swine Husbandry Award as

presented by the Manitoba Pork Council. Animal activist groups have scrutinized the animal handling of our drivers and found that we are in fact practicing what we preach.

We fully endorse initiatives such as the Trucker Quality Assurance™ training program as set out by the US National Pork Producers Council. We were the first fleet to require 100% of our drivers be TQA™ certified, prior to mandatory certification was implemented.

All drivers are trained in proper animal handling as outlined in the TQA™ handbook describing the hog's natural urge to escape and tendency to follow each other. The flight zone and point of balance is explained in detail to equip the driver to be able to calmly and successfully load the animals with minimal stress. Training is given to explain that aggressive handling is dangerous and how loading and unloading alone can cause excessive stress for the animals. Symptoms such as open mouth breathing, squealing, skin blotchiness, stiffness and muscle tremors can be used as guidelines to determine that the animal is fatigued. Education is given on meat quality and the effect that stress and fatigue has on the final product for consumers. Stock prods are prohibited on breeding stock loads and drivers are only allowed to use prods on other loads, after express permission has been given at the site. Sorting boards and plastic paddles are the recommended tools for the job.

Stocking densities, as described previously, are outlined for our drivers as they make decisions to ensure the trailer is loaded keeping the comfort of the animal in mind. We have also developed a Bedding Requirements Chart outlining the proper amount of bedding required for North America's extreme weather conditions, including humidex factors.

Truckers are well informed on the correlation between all aspects of the food chain and their role in ensuring a superior product for the consumer and profitability for the producer.

■ Our Team

The strength in our company is in part a direct result of the values placed on relationships. Honesty and integrity along with encouraging an attitude of personal responsibility are core values of Steve's Livestock Transport. Drivers appreciate the work life balance they are able to achieve in a career at Steve's Livestock Transport. The opportunity for advancement within Steve's group of companies allows each individual to develop to their full potential in whatever area they wish to pursue. Most positions are posted internally prior to an external advertising campaign in order to encourage professional development through a new challenge.

All new drivers must complete a 3 day comprehensive orientation program, including training on safety and compliance, biosecurity protocols, humane animal handling, and all aspects of today's livestock transportation industry. Each driver receives a handbook outlining each part of the training to keep with them for future reference. Our training includes discussion on the requirements for professionalism in attitude and appearance, open communication with customers and coworkers, and our focus on quality of life.

Our dispatchers have previous driving experience and understand the challenges the drivers face as well as our goal of meeting and exceeding customer expectations. Dispatchers are TQA™ certified and rotate to ensure someone is on call 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

From wash bay personnel to drivers to dispatchers to mechanics to welders to office staff – all play an integral role in keeping the trucks on the road and so much more! Job satisfaction and pride in a job well done help us all to enjoy life while being part of the team.

■ Conclusion

In our experience, the road to success for any business is paved with the desire to be a proactive catalyst for change rather than reactive to the challenges of the industry. In the future, the hog industry will continue to face challenges, including, the rising costs associated with fuel and feed along with the implementation of Country of Origin Labeling. Our collective goal of being globally competitive must remain, as we all do our part to help shape and form the industry we are a part of.

■ Additional Information

National Pork Board, Pork Checkoff's Trucker Quality Assurance™ Program
<http://www.pork.org/producers/tqa/tqa.aspx>