

# Animal welfare benefits to mobile-slaughter of cattle

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We reviewed the main welfare benefits in the literature relating to mobile slaughter i.e. the reduction of transport and manipulation in a more familiar environment and carried out focus group-meetings to describe the opinions on mobile slaughter among on-farm meat processing cattle breeders, cattle farmers and American bison breeders.

The European legislation allows for national initiatives that investigate animal-friendly alternatives of live transport to the slaughterhouse such as the development of a mobile slaughter unit.



*"Mobile slaughterhouses reduce the need for animals to be transported over long distances and therefore may contribute to safeguarding animal welfare. However, technical constraints for mobile slaughterhouses differ from fixed slaughterhouses and **technical rules may need to be consequently adapted**. Therefore, this Regulation should provide for the **possibility to establish derogations exempting mobile slaughterhouses from the requirements on layout, construction and equipment of slaughterhouses**. Pending the adoption of such derogations, it is appropriate to **allow Member States to establish or maintain national rules regarding mobile slaughterhouses**."*

Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 september 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing.

Also, the Eurobarometer (2015) shows an increasing demand for products from welfare-friendly production systems.

## Welfare problems during transport

- ⇒ high injury risk at loading and unloading;
- ⇒ significant increase in bruises and wounds due to rough driving style;
- ⇒ shocks and sensory stimuli of driving, injuries, fatigue, waiting time, deprivation of water;
- ⇒ transport duration;
- ⇒ inadequate micro-climate: excessive heat leads to heat stress and lowered welfare, tissue damage, mortality and decreased immune response;
- ⇒ temperament, breed and individual differences influence stress response.

## Welfare problems during handling

- ⇒ breeds with wild temperament and extensively kept grazers show more agitated behaviour and higher cortisol levels in unfamiliar settings;
- ⇒ regrouping results in more fights in young bulls;
- ⇒ mixing unknown individuals, inadequate handling, high numbers of animals, bad equipment and facility design increases the risk of bruising.

Transport results in stress, increased potential for injuries, and a higher potential for subsequent lower meat quality and quantity. The main animal welfare benefits of a mobile slaughter unit consist of a decrease in transport time and transport-associated stressors, especially for wild or extensively kept animals. For animals unfit for travel, on-farm slaughter is a practical solution.

**We carried out focus group-meetings to describe the opinions on mobile slaughter among on-farm meat processing Flemish cattle breeders, cattle farmers and among Belgian and French breeders of American bison.**

## Perceived potential benefits?

- ⇒ the low-stress, respectful, relaxed, familiar, quiet context for the animal, translating in higher meat quality;
- ⇒ important welfare benefits for wilder species and individuals;
- ⇒ they consider a respectful death of high importance;
- ⇒ on-farm mobile slaughter offers an attractive marketing story;
- ⇒ parallel with the decreased animal-stress, the farmers expect to stress less themselves;
- ⇒ maximal transparency from birth till death;
- ⇒ some breeders see a potential for on-farm education concerning slaughter.

## Perceived hindrances?

- ⇒ present uncertainty about national legal aspects and food safety regulations;
- ⇒ practical organization with regard to timing and location;
- ⇒ post mortem meat processing and conservation;
- ⇒ waste treatment;
- ⇒ cost and profitability of the endeavor.

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(Pictures: GlobalMeatnews.com; Friesla.com; www.mobileslaughter.com; natuurvlees.be; trivan.com/mobile-processing-unit; wildideabuffalo.com; reporterre.net)

