

The welfare of bobby calves

Best practice guidelines

Bobby calf welfare is becoming an issue of increasing importance, both in New Zealand and overseas.

All parts of the system, including farmers, transport operators and processors have a role to play in ensuring the welfare of these animals. **These guidelines are intended to help you meet the welfare needs of the animals in your care** and to comply with the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act 1999.

On the farm

Bobby calves need to be given the same degree of care as every other calf on the farm. The following basic requirements should be met when looking after bobby calves:

- **Colostrum** – Bobby calves must be fed colostrum (2-4 litres/calf) within the first 24 hours of life. To aid local immunity, colostrum should also be fed to them daily for the first four days of life.
- **Handling** – Handle calves gently and with care at all times. Do not throw, hit or drag a calf at any time. Electric prodders must not be used on bobby calves.
- **Weather protection** – Bobby calves must be protected from extremes of weather, especially wind, rain and cold at all times. They should be moved to a sheltered enclosure as soon as practicable after birth.
- **Enclosure** – Keep bobby calves in a safe and sheltered enclosure at all times. There should be minimal risk of injury to either animal or human e.g. from slipping or striking sharp objects.
- **Flooring** – A comfortable lying area, being dry, clean and free from unpleasant odour should be provided for calves at all times. Exposed concrete, bare earth and mud floors are not acceptable.
- **Water** – Calves should have free access to water at all times.
- **Age at presentation** – Calves must be a minimum of four days old¹ before being presented for slaughter.

How do I know if my calves are fit for transport?

In addition to being a minimum of four days old before transport, the following signs will indicate if a calf is fit for transport:

- **Healthy** – No visible disease (e.g. scours), deformity, injury, blindness or disability. 'Eyes bright', not dull or shrunken. Ears are upright.
- **Strong** – Able to bear weight on all four limbs. Able to rise from a lying position and move freely around the pen.
- **Hooves** – firm and worn, not rounded or soft.
- **Navel** – Dry and withered, not pink/red, raw or fleshy.
- **Fed** – At least half the day's ration of colostrum (or colostrum substitute) is given not more than two hours before pick-up.

Make it easy for the truck driver

- Do not present calves which are not fit for transport.
- Make sure that there is easy access for the truck. A solid base with no overhanging objects is preferred, as this makes it quicker/easier to load the calves.
- If you have a raised pen (not a roadside crate), ensure it is available for the truck driver to use. Raised pens should be 70-100cm off the ground.
- If holding calves in a large pen, provide a means of controlling animal movement, e.g. boards or a moveable gate, so that animals are easier to catch.



During loading/ transport

The following basic requirements should be met when loading/transporting bobby calves:

- **Fit for transport** – Make sure the calves are fit for transport. Slow and unsteady calves or those with a wet navel or concave (sunken) stomach may not be fit for transport.
- **Handle with care** – Bobby calves are only four days old and are fragile. They should be handled gently and with care. Never throw a bobby calf into a truck or lift it by its head or legs. Get help with lifting heavy or large calves. Avoid lifting calves off the ground and use a raised pen if one is provided.
- **Cover the calves** – Once the top deck is loaded, a mesh cover (e.g. trampoline material) or solid roof must be used to protect the animals from the effects of adverse weather.
- **Use approved crates** – NZ Road Transport Forum approved crates are preferred for transporting bobby calves for processing². All crates should be clean and fit for purpose.
- **Drive carefully** – Bobby calves are less able to withstand the stress of transport than older stock. Drive with care, avoiding harsh acceleration/braking and high-speed cornering.
- **Check your stock** – Check the state of the animals at regular intervals during the journey and take action if they are showing signs of distress or injury.

1 The only exceptions to this are with a valid veterinary certificate or with a formal arrangement with a pet food processor. Note that pet food processors have separate requirements which must be met.

2 Road Transport Forum of New Zealand Stockrate Code 4 – Transport of Livestock V4.

At the processing plant

The following basic requirements should be met at the processing plant:

- **Handle calves gently and with care at all times** – Move calves calmly and carefully. They are likely to be tired, hungry and stressed after their journey and will require patience when moving them.
- **Protect calves from the elements** – Move the animals to a sheltered enclosure as soon as possible after unloading to protect them from wind, rain and cold. Pay particular attention to local weather conditions. Protection is especially important if animals are to be held overnight.
- **Water and feed** – Ensure calves have free access to water at all times and if animals are being held overnight, consider giving them access to appropriate, good quality feed (e.g. milk substitute) in order to improve survivability.
- **Process calves humanely and as soon as possible after arrival** – Manage collection to slaughter time to ensure that long haul transport is minimised and that calves are processed within 28 hours (maximum) of last feed. Give priority to calves which have travelled long distances, have been held overnight, or have been identified as 'at risk' by the inspecting vet.

Write your useful contact numbers here

- Your stock agent: ()
- Your transport operator: ()
- Your veterinarian: ()
- MAF Enforcement Group: **0800 327 027**

Legal requirements

The Animal Welfare Act 1999, places a 'duty of care' on all those involved with the management of production animals, including farmers, transporters and processors. Penalties for failing to meet the needs of animals, including bobby calves, are severe and include both fines and imprisonment. Food safety inspectors operate at processing plants and take action on all animal welfare issues they identify. Serious issues are passed on to MAF for further investigation and possible legal action. In the case of animals sent for slaughter, the duty of care remains with all parties until the animal has been killed.

Further information

From MAF:

- Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Animals Transported within New Zealand
- Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Bobby Calves
- A guide to the Welfare of Calves During Transport (leaflet)

From DairyNZ:

- Why care about bobby calves? (leaflet)
- Information poster (sent with this guide)

From the NZ Road Transport Forum:

- Livestock Handling – Best Practice Guide

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