

# Successful transport *of breeding stock and market animals*

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*This is the first in a series of marketing-themed articles written specifically for the Canadian Meat Goat Journal by CMGA past-president Kerry O'Donnell. Upcoming issues will feature more detailed information on how to improve and maximize your profit as animals move from the auction mart to the processor.*

**A**t one time or another, many of us have been faced with the need to find transportation for our animals from one place to another. Whether it is the transportation of breeding stock from one part of the country to the other, or moving market animals to a distant selling point, the task of finding good reliable transportation can sometimes be daunting.

Whether we are moving valuable breeding stock, or animals destined for slaughter, the care of the animals during transport is a primary concern (for our pocket books in the case of the slaughter animals, our reputation in the case of sellers, and our overall satisfaction in the case of buyers). The welfare of the animals enroute is, of course, also a primary concern.

So, if one wants to move animals from point A to B, where, and how, does one go about locating a transport company that will look after both the animals' and owners' needs, and what does one need to do in order to ensure their animals arrive at their end point in the best possible condition?

In order to answer some of these questions, CMGA had the opportunity to speak with Howard Smith of Howard Smith Transport Company.

Howard Smith is based out of Caron, Saskatchewan and has been in the livestock trucking industry since 1973. His company began in the cattle trucking business. Recognizing the need for transportation specific to the small ruminant industry, his focus changed, and for the past 20 years Howard Smith has been dedicated to the cross country hauling of goats and sheep. He presently operates four 4-deck trailers with each truck making two round trips per month (primarily from Alberta to Southern Ontario.) With each truck capable of comfortably housing 400-500 animals (depending on size), his company moves a considerable number of animals every week of the year from West to East, and back again.

Here are some of the questions we had for Howard and his answers for us:

**1) *There are lots of trucking companies out there – how does a person find a good one?***

You can find trucking companies by calling local auction marts, searching on the internet, finding ads in industry newspapers and publications, etc. According to Howard, one of the best ways to find a "good" trucking company is by word of mouth. Talk to other people that have had experience in shipping goats longer distances and see who they do and do not recommend and why. If you are talking to a company, ask questions such as:

- How long have you been in the industry? Chances are that if someone has been in business for many years it is because they are good at what they do and have established a good reputation for themselves.

• How often do you truck goats and how many do you usually haul? Howard points out that hauling goats is NOT the same as hauling cattle, horses, pigs, or other livestock and that finding someone with knowledge and experience specifically in small ruminants can make a difference in the success of the transport. In regards to transporting goats, the stocking density on the truck needs to be carefully considered, the sorting of different types of goats into the various compartments on the trucks needs to be done appropriately, the type of equipment specific to handling the goats is different, maintaining the correct temperature during transport as far as enclosing the animals in the winter and reducing the stocking rate in the heat of the summer, etc. are all things that a company that does not do a lot of trucking of goats might not have experience with or take into consideration. The frequency and number of goats that a company has hauled will also likely have a bearing on how experienced the drivers are in regards to working with goats effectively. Drivers are the ones responsible for the loading and unloading of the goats and sorting them into their compartments on the truck. Any of us who has ever had the experience of having someone around to “help” us with our goats (who has never worked with a goat before), can likely attest to the fact that this usually does not go very well! Having drivers that are experienced with goats makes a great difference in the stress the animals experience as they are moved, loaded, transported and unloaded.

## **2) What is the price per head?**

Trucking a single animal from Saskatchewan to southern Ontario can cost anywhere from \$15.00/head to \$100.00/head (or more). The price per head depends on the trucking company, the distance traveled, the size of the animal, the total number of animals on the load, any back hauls involved, etc. Price is also determined by the overall service provided. For a company that is going to drive straight through from point A to point B, the price will likely be lower than a company that stops the truck half way, unloads all the animals and provides a rest area with feed and water enroute. Special requests will also add to the cost of transport. In regards to transportation of breeding stock, if a customer wishes those animals to be held in a separate compartment for health reasons, the price will be higher as this tends to take up available space on the truck and does entail more work on the part of the trucking company.

## **3) In the case of selling market animals, what should producers do (and not do), to ensure they get the best price for their animals?**

According to Howard, the most important thing producers can do is to ensure they are sending good quality animals that have been well fed prior to transport. At the Cookstown

Market (which Howard has many years of experience with), market kids 50 lbs. + are generally desired. (Special markets such as Christmas and Easter also favor a lighter 30 lb. market kid.) At an average sale, eight buyers will be present, and at peak times 30-40 buyers can be expected. Even though there is strong demand for meat goats at this market, the buyers still look for quality. Sick, lame, malnourished, emaciated animals will experience a distinct discount. In regards to cull animals, the same principles apply. A cull doe who is in good condition and healthy will bring a good price, while an old, thin, weak, sick cull will not. The animal MUST be able to ambulate well prior to loading. Any animal that has difficulty standing/walking will not be allowed on the truck.

At the current time, legislation stipulates that goats can be trucked for up to 48 hours without having to stop for feed and water. In Howard’s experience, goats will tolerate this very well if they are in good condition, have been fed well prior to transport, and if they are transported in a well bedded truck with enough room for the animals to lay down and rest enroute.

## **4) What does the producer need to keep in mind when utilizing a trucking company?**

Trucking companies are in the business of meeting their customers’ needs as well as making a living for themselves. Most companies will do their best to get people’s animals where they need to go, but producers need to keep a few things in mind as well.

If you have a specific time in mind to market, contact the trucker well ahead of time. If you are aiming for the Christmas market for example, do not wait until a week before you want to ship to call the trucker – chances are the load will be full and you will be disappointed.

When the trucker asks you how many animals you have and what they weigh – be specific. Do not guess that you have fifty 60 lb. kids when in fact you actually have eighty-five 80 lb. kids. When truckers put their loads together each week they do so based on what producers are telling them. When producers are inaccurate with their information, the end result is a truck that may be 1/3 empty, or a truck that is overbooked, meaning that someone’s animals are not going to make that load.

Realize that you are likely going to be asked to meet the truck somewhere enroute at a specific time. In the case of the large trucking companies, they do have a specific route that they must follow in order to reach their destination in a reasonable amount of time. It is simply not possible for them to deviate miles from that course to drive to each and every individual producer’s farm to pick up their animals. According to Howard the drive from Western Saskatchewan to Thunder Bay, Ontario is 24-30 hours. His trucks stop in Thunder Bay to offload the animals for feed and water for 8-

12 hours, and then reload and drive a further 30 hours before reaching Cookstown, Ontario.

Be prepared to be at the designated meeting place on time. Being late inconveniences the trucker, the animals already on the load, and every other producer further along the pick up points.

Be clear about any special requests you have. If you are looking at transporting breeding stock and need them in a separate compartment on the truck, let the trucker know that up front so that he can make the appropriate arrangements ahead of time. Do not assume that informing the trucker that you have breeding stock automatically means that they will receive special treatment. If you do not want them riding on the truck with a group of lambs destined for the auction mart, you need to convey this information at the time you are making your arrangements.

Long distance trucking is something that many of us will consider and use at some point while we are in the industry whether we are commercial producers or purebred seed stock producers. Hopefully this article has provided answers to some of the questions members might have, and has provided some further insight for those who already use this service. ✎

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