

Loading and Transportation of Broiler Chickens in Ontario During Extreme Cold, Snow and Wind Chill

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Chicken
Farmers
of Ontario

aocp
Association of Ontario
Chicken Processors

Background

Animal welfare is of significant importance to the Ontario chicken industry. Industry recognizes that there are times when environmental conditions are extreme and do not favour the humane transportation of chicken. Stakeholder understanding of their responsibilities for bird welfare, along with clear and effective communication of expectations among stakeholders, is critical for effective decision making when making this assessment. Extreme cold, snow and wind chill are a reality of the climate in Ontario. Accordingly, the industry must be ready to make decisions that appropriately consider the welfare of broiler chickens.

The document “Should this Bird be Loaded?” is an excellent guide used by industry to assist in making loading and transportation decisions. With respect to extreme winter conditions this communication supplements the information provided in “Should this Bird be Loaded” outlining best practices for industry stakeholders to follow.¹

Loading and Transporting Broiler Chickens in Ontario in Extreme Cold, Snow and Wind Chill

All stakeholders are expected to make all reasonable efforts to raise, catch, load, transport and process chickens humanely. Loading of birds should only occur if environmental conditions favour humane transport. The decision to cancel loading may occur at any point including during the loading process if birds are deemed unfit for travel or environmental conditions do not favour humane transport.

The following best practices are a guide for industry stakeholders in responding to extreme cold, snow and wind chill.

¹Industry stakeholders will need to be familiar with requirements in [Chapter 12](#) of the CFIA Meat Hygiene Manual of Procedures when it comes into force in 2016. The **Loading and Transportation of Broiler Chickens in Ontario During Extreme Cold, Snow and Wind Chill** document is not meant to capture all of the requirements of [Chapter 12](#). Stakeholders are encouraged to read the CFIA manual for a full understanding of their responsibilities.

Suggested Best Practices for Farmers

- ✓ Farmers will be certified in CFO's Animal Care Program and knowledgeable with respect to the loading decision tree (also known as "Should this Bird be Loaded?")
- ✓ Document relevant animal welfare knowledge based on CFO's Animal Care Program
- ✓ Stocking density must comply with the requirements of CFO's Animal Care Program
- ✓ It is important to estimate as accurately as possible bird average weight and bird count so that the processor can plan for the appropriate number of crates, trucks and crate density. Bird count to be determined by subtracting mortality and culled birds from total number of birds as recorded on the Chick Placement Information report by the hatchery
- ✓ Manage barn conditions to keep birds dry
- ✓ Advise processors of any health issues with the flock (eg. respiratory problems)
- ✓ Evaluate bird fitness for travel
- ✓ The farmer must call and notify the processor if birds are not fit for travel on the day of loading anytime up until the catchers arrive so that a decision involving the farmer, catching company, transporter and processing plant can be made prior to load-out
- ✓ Communications with the catcher, transporter and processor are critical at all times to ensure birds unfit for travel are not loaded
- ✓ Be flexible to allow for changes in loading times that will reduce bird stress
- ✓ Develop contingency plans in the event that birds are not fit for travel or if birds cannot be loaded due to extreme cold, snow, wind chill, or road closures
- ✓ At processor request, provide information on barn orientation and loading doors relative to the sun and wind to assist in establishing an appropriate loading time
- ✓ Initiate protocols to reduce bird stress eg. add vitamins and electrolytes 1 day prior to shipment, and gradually reduce barn temperature just prior to shipping (assuming that birds will be shipped.)

Suggested Best Practices for Catchers

- ✓ Catchers have been trained or will be completing relevant animal welfare training. [For example OMAFRA broiler catching course and loading decision tree (also known as “Should this Bird be Loaded?”).]
- ✓ Document relevant animal welfare training.
- ✓ With the farmer or farmer representative, evaluate bird fitness for travel and confirm that environmental and road conditions favour humane transport.
- ✓ Collaborate with the processor to avoid loading birds during the coldest periods of the day.
- ✓ Consult with the processor, transporter and farmer or farmer representative prior to a decision not to load birds.
- ✓ Notify the farmer and processor immediately if birds are not fit to travel or weather conditions prevent transportation and the flock will not be loaded.
- ✓ When catching birds, take into consideration options to reduce stress on the birds, given the different barn and loading configurations. Follow the crate density guidelines provided by the processor (or transporter in consultation with the processor) unless there is concern that the densities specified are not appropriate and then notify Crew Supervisor.
- ✓ Load birds in the minimum time possible without compromising bird welfare.
- ✓ Document barn conditions and weather.
- ✓ Do not load wet birds.

Suggested Best Practices for Transporters

- ✓ Transporters have been trained or will be completing relevant animal welfare training. [For example OMAFRA broiler catching course and loading decision tree (also known as “Should this Bird be Loaded?”), and the Canadian Livestock Transport (CLT) Certification Program.]
- ✓ Document relevant animal welfare training
- ✓ Evaluate bird fitness for travel and confirm that environmental and road conditions favour humane transport.
- ✓ Consult with the processor, catcher, farmer or farmer representative prior to a decision not to load birds.
- ✓ Document what is known about barn and bird conditions, loading procedures and weather conditions.
- ✓ Notify the farmer and processor immediately if birds are not fit to travel, or conditions do not favour humane transportation, and the flock will not be loaded.
- ✓ Use best efforts to position truck so that birds are shielded from direct wind.
- ✓ Collaborate with the processor to avoid loading birds during the coldest periods of the day.
- ✓ After loading, the transporter should proceed immediately to the processing plant. If short stops are necessary to allow the load to warm up, document the time and length of stop. If necessary adjust the tarps.
- ✓ Develop contingency plans in response to traffic issues that will slow or halt transportation. If possible, a longer slower route is preferred to sitting at a standstill in traffic.
- ✓ Check load at delivery by documenting the condition of the birds at delivery to the plant, recognizing the limitations of this observation, as only the lower outside perimeter of the truck can be properly visually assessed.

Suggested Best Practices for Processors

- ✓ Staff who handle live birds have been trained or will be completing relevant animal welfare training. [For example internal training, OMAFRA broiler catching course and loading decision tree (also known as “Should this Bird be Loaded?”).]
- ✓ Document relevant animal welfare training.
- ✓ Schedule catching, loading and delivery to minimize bird stress. When possible adjust schedule to prevent loading in the coldest periods of the day.
- ✓ Provide catchers and transporters with the stocking density guidelines prior to catching. In some cases the processor and transporter jointly determine the stocking density.
- ✓ In the event of extreme cold, snow or wind chill, have internal discussions within your company regarding decisions to load birds.
- ✓ Request information on barn orientation and loading doors relative to the wind to assist in establishing appropriate loading times.
- ✓ Monitor weather forecasts at point of pick up to determine if weather conditions favour humane transport and if processors need to adjust schedules accordingly.
- ✓ Check load at delivery by documenting the condition of the birds at delivery to the plant, recognizing the limitations of this observation, as only the lower outside perimeter of the truck can be properly visually assessed.
- ✓ Monitor birds and provide appropriate ventilation in lairage.
- ✓ Expedite processing of a load if birds demonstrate signs of distress.
- ✓ Develop contingency plans in the event birds cannot be loaded, are delayed in transit or for plant breakdowns.

When Loading has been Cancelled

Scenario: Loading has been cancelled or delayed before any birds are loaded

- ✓ In a no-load situation the farmer must put birds back on water as soon as possible after the time that the no-load notification is received.
- ✓ Farmer/processor communication should occur relative to placing birds back on feed. The farmer may need to have more feed delivered to the farm.
- ✓ Given that birds will gorge themselves after being off feed it is recommended that the farmer and processor agree on the length of feed withdrawal to be used.
- ✓ Farmer and processor must communicate as early as possible after the no-load decision (during regular business hours) regarding when loading will be scheduled.
- ✓ No load decisions will be communicated to AOCP and CFO by the processing company so affected.

Scenario: Loading has been cancelled or delayed during the catching process

- ✓ In a stop-load situation the farmer must put birds back on water as soon as possible after the stop-load notification is received.
- ✓ Farmer/processor communication should occur relative to placing birds back on feed. The farmer may need to have more feed delivered to the farm.
- ✓ Given that birds will gorge themselves after being off feed it is recommended that the farmer and processor agree on the length of feed withdrawal to be used.
- ✓ Farmer and processor must communicate as early as possible after the stop-load decision (during regular business hours) regarding when loading will be scheduled.
- ✓ Cancelled loading situations will be communicated to AOCP and CFO for documentation purposes by the processing company so affected

For more information visit:
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