

## Loading and Transportation of Broiler Chickens in Ontario During Extreme Heat and Humidity

### 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. With summer heat and humidity being a reality of the climate in Ontario 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 heat and humidity this communication supplements the information provided in “Should this Bird be Loaded?” by summarizing symptoms of heat stress that can be used to assess a bird’s fitness to travel and suggests best practices for industry stakeholders to follow<sup>1</sup>.

1. Visible signs of heat stress when birds are experiencing or have very recently experienced high environmental temperatures and humidity:
  - Increased mortality
  - Reduced growth rate
  - Reduced feed intake
  - Increased water intake
  - Wet droppings
  - Birds growing unevenly
  - Open mouth breathing, usually with neck extended
  - Gasping
  - Wing spreading
  - Squatting close to the ground
  - Reluctance to move, slowness and lethargy
  - Dark red or purple colouration of comb, head, and breast musculature
  - In late stages of heat stress: stupor, staggering, terminal convulsions resulting in death

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<sup>1</sup> Industry 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 Heat and Humidity 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.



## **Loading and Transporting Broiler Chickens in Ontario in Extreme Heat and Humidity:**

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 heat and humidity.

### **Suggested Best Practices for Industry Stakeholders**

#### **a) 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?")
- Able to recognize signs of heat stress
- 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/modules, trucks and crate/module 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
- 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 heat and humidity
- At processor request, provide information on barn orientation and loading doors relative to the sun to assist in establishing an appropriate loading time
- Initiate protocols to reduce bird stress (e.g. Add electrolytes or Vitamin C to drinking water 1-2 days before high heat /humidity conditions; mist birds only in combination with air movement)

b) **Catchers**

- Catchers have been trained or will be completing relevant animal welfare training. For example, the Poultry Handling and Transportation Course.
- Document relevant animal welfare training.
- With the farmer or farmer representative, evaluate bird fitness for travel and confirm that environmental conditions favour humane transport.
- Collaborate with the processor to avoid loading birds during the hottest 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 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/module 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.
- If loading damp birds, load them last if possible.

c) **Transporters**

- Transporters have been trained or will be completing relevant animal welfare training. For example, the Poultry Handling and Transportation Course or the Canadian Livestock Transport (CLT) Certification Program.
- Document relevant animal welfare training
- Evaluate bird fitness for travel and confirm that environmental 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 sun.
- Collaborate with the processor to avoid loading birds during the hottest periods of the day.



- After loading, the transporter should proceed immediately to the processing plant. Should short stops be necessary, document the time and length of stop.
- 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.

d) **Processors**

- Staff who handle live birds have been trained or will be completing relevant animal welfare training. For example, the Poultry Handling and Transportation Course.
- Document relevant animal welfare training.
- Schedule catching, loading and delivery to minimize bird stress. When possible adjust schedule to prevent loading in the hottest 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 heat and humidity have internal discussions within your company regarding decisions to load birds.
- Request information on barn orientation and loading doors relative to the sun 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.
- Misting may be an effective hot weather management technique in conjunction with air movement.
- 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.