

Care of animals during transport

(Abstract)

The question of welfare, or rather one of the key questions of the ethical considerations regarding animals, has found in the critical moment of transport, a space of privileged attention, both from public opinion and from national and European legislators.

Many factors have contributed to this phenomenon. It is certain in fact, that during transport, animals undergo suffering and stress, but it is on transport that delicate political and economical stability converge in countries of Northern and Southern Europe.

The Italian acknowledgment of the European directive 95/29/CE has hence offered for this work a starting point to step back and think about ethical implications in transport of animals for human purposes.

The volume presents a critical circumstantial interpretation of the set of rules in force on this matter in order to identify, in the actual transport, the critical points and the possible ways to achieve a concrete care of animal welfare during transport.

The analysis of the real and actual contest has suggested the following considerations:

- the need of further studies on animal welfare during transport freed from political and economical requirements;
- the opportunity to start off a concrete training policy of all those who are involved in this field of activity, not only on technical subject matters, but also and especially on ethical implications of such practices;
- to provide incentives for the involved firms to sponsor, with appropriate signs fixed on the transport vehicles, the conformity of the live-stock to the set of rules in force in regard to welfare matters: the purpose of this initiative is to promote an advertising policy of an ethical quality brand of animal meat (stock-breeding methods, transport and slaughter that guarantee to protect animal welfare);
- compulsory institution of specific licenses for the qualification to transport animals (issued only after specific training courses);
- the incentive of caring policies guaranteed to the category of carriers in order to facilitate the adjustment of the firms to animal welfare care standards (institution of a temporary system of minimum prices and tax-facilities for associations and co-operatives of small carriers);
- to facilitate as far as possible all critical manouvres during transport (loading and unloading of animals, customs, stopover, etc), in order to minimize suffering and stress of the animals travelling, but also of the carriers (adjustment to the rules provided for safety at work).

The importance of the veterinary profession role in this branch of activity is evident; take for example the fact that National Service vets have to express their opinion on the fitness of the animals before they continue their journey after a break in special stop-sites.

Also evident is the limit in this matter of the rules which are often directed by economical and political interest opinions, and which in any case are too rigid to provide for all the real circumstances of suffering of animals during transport.

However, a rise in responsibility of those who are involved in the transport, seems to be a good starting point.

Once the need for a greater care of animals has been integrated in a more general restructure of this branch of activity (from breeding to slaughtering in the direction of a growing interest not only for animal welfare, but also for protection of human health and safeguard of the environment), it would be wise to establish a self-checking system : this means , in a long term prospect, the creation of a favourable growing responsibility system in the farms themselves which could provide a self-certification guarantee for transport quality and ethics , and moreover in general for the meat produced.

The method to follow should be that of the HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point). This kind of self-checking, for which farms should certify the methods used to minimize risk of suffering in critical moments, would not however substitute higher level control which could in fact be carried out not only in relation to the requirements specified by the rules, but it could also cover all those mechanisms that the farm certifies through the means of self-checking.

These considerations move from the awareness of the Committee of the complexity of the notion of animal welfare. This in fact depends mainly from the ethical prospects which have been considered (which besides differ also within the Committee itself , since both the animalists and the representatives of the carriers have collaborated to the drafting of the volume), and besides a definition of welfare in clinical terms is very difficult.

In such a combination of views it is difficult to imagine that it could be possible to set out ethical rules valid for everyone in the same set way. Instead it seems that a prior need is that to incentive policies which promote processes to root ethical responsibility in all those who are involved in the transport. This target, which has been considered ethical, requires that the question of principles in this case should leave more space to considerations, actions and policies of practical intervention , especially since in society differences within ethical positions, relative to animals and their welfare, are still enormous and often irreconcilable. The belief that has inspired this work is a determination to believe that, in respect of a pluralism of principles, it is however possible to find different ways to improve activities in this field minimizing suffering, so that ,at least in the near future, they can represent a common target for everybody.

Documents of the Veterinary Bioethical Committee, *Care of animals during transport*,

C.G. Edizioni Medico Scientifiche, Torino 1999.