

DENMARK

BEHIND THE WHEEL: INSIGHTS ON BIOSECURITY FROM TRUCK DRIVERS COLLECTING LIVESTOCK

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EVOLVING DANISH DAIRY FARMS: WHY BIOSECURITY MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

The structure of Danish cattle farming is evolving, with herd sizes steadily increasing and more farms operating across multiple sites. The average Danish dairy herd now has around 250 cows. While not large by international standards, this represents a significant shift within Denmark. As herd sizes grow, animal movements become more frequent, including transport for slaughter, sale, or export.

This increases the importance of strong biosecurity. Yet many farmers find it difficult to recognize the specific risk factors on their farms or to know how best to address them. This underlines the need for practical and accessible solutions to support on-farm biosecurity.

UNDERSTANDING BIOSECURITY PRACTICES THROUGH THE EYES OF TRUCK DRIVERS

The aim of our study was to gain insights into the practices of biosecurity on Danish dairy farms during the collection of livestock for slaughter, sale or export. Additionally, we wanted to understand the truck drivers' knowledge and motivation regarding biosecurity. We spent a working day with 10 different truck drivers as they collected cattle.

OBSERVING AND INTERVIEWING TRUCK DRIVERS ACROSS DANISH FARMS

We contacted eleven different transport companies that collect cattle for slaughter or export and asked if we could join them for a day and interview the truck drivers. Ten companies agreed to let us accompany one of their drivers during

"I'd hate to get a reputation for being the one who brings in infection"

Frank Olesen, Danish truck driver

a workday. Of these, seven companies collected cattle for slaughter, while three collected calves (2-4 weeks old) for sale or export.

On each farm we visited, we noted the type of farm (dairy, beef cattle, or veal calves) and the biosecurity measures in place regarding the transfer of animals. Throughout the day, we interviewed the truck drivers about their knowledge of biosecurity, the measures they were aware of and what worked for them. We also explored their attitudes towards biosecurity.

REVEALING BIOSECURITY GAPS

We visited 49 different farms. At 11 farms (22%), the truck entered the barn, often with cattle from other farms on board. At 14 farms (29%), the truck stayed just outside the barn, but the driver entered to help load the cattle. Only one farm provided designated boots for the driver; at the other farms, the driver entered with potentially contaminated footwear. Generally, there were few places where it was possible to clean boots near the loading area.

Most of the drivers were aware of the risk they posed. Several mentioned this when entering the barn with the truck. They did not like being seen as a risk factor but followed the farmers' instructions. They were willing to adhere to the biosecurity measures provided by the farmers.

TRUCK DRIVERS' ROLE IN FARM BIOSECURITY AND DISEASE PREVENTION

There is potential for improvement. The current practices on many Danish cattle

	Cattle trailer	Truck outside door or gate to the barn. Driver do not enter barn	Truck outside door or gate. Driver entering barn.	Truck and driver entered barn or calf hutch area
Dairy cattle	6	5	5	5
Veal calves for slaughter		2	3	
Beef cattle	2		3	
Young calves for sale	6	3	3	6

Figure 1

farms when collecting animals for export, sale or slaughter may increase the risk of disease introduction to the herd. This study helped raise awareness of this important issue in biosecurity.

The findings indicated that truck drivers were generally aware of biosecurity risks and expressed willingness to follow measures provided by the farm. Some also raised concerns about being a potential source of disease transmission. This highlights the importance of both farm-level facilities and the overall biosecurity culture, which together are essential for enabling effective biosecurity while also facilitating cattle handling, ensuring truck driver safety, and supporting cow welfare.

THE FUTURE OF SAFE CATTLE LOADING

To enhance biosecurity when loading cattle for slaughter, practical solutions need to be implemented on farms. The next step in this project is to design and describe various options for loading facilities that improve biosecurity, ensure safe handling of the animals, and maintain high welfare standards for the cattle.

It is not feasible to find a one-size-fits-all solution. Therefore, it is crucial to provide different options to accommodate the diverse needs of farms.

