

## **The Colorado Non-Ambulatory Animal Statute**

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Like many Americans, you will probably recall vividly the national media coverage of deplorable animal conditions in south St Paul stockyards and the Modesto packing houses. Footage aired on television was taken by animal activists. It showed "downer" cows being moved by fork lifts and dragged off trucks. Commentary focused on inhumane livestock handling and questioned food safety and wholesomeness. Such exposes fuel public concern about livestock welfare.

Concerned cattlemen, veterinarians and livestock market owners in Colorado have discussed these problems and considered proactive means to minimize these negative images. Recognizing that most livestock owners do not conduct this type of business, legislation was drafted to discourage these incidents. A statute was passed by the State Legislature in 1996, labeled HB 96-1340, with endorsement by the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Colorado Cattle Feeder's Association, Colorado Farm Bureau Federation, Western Dairymen's Cooperative, Inc, Colorado Pork Producers and Colorado Veterinary Medical Association. The intent is to discourage delivery of substandard livestock to public markets, especially downers, and animals with broken legs, severe debilitation or severe eye problems.

How does this new legislation affect you? The veterinarian from the Colorado Department of Agriculture at the livestock market now has the right, under specific guidelines, to refuse the sale of certain animals and to euthanize them if necessary. The act specifically includes

- (1) Animals that cannot stand and walk on their own power;
- (2) Animals that can not bear weight on a limb without collapsing due to an obvious long bone fracture or joint dislocation;
- (3) Animals in the lower 20% of the body condition score for that species due to a chronic debilitating condition
- (4) Animals with cancer of the eye or any organ that can not be removed surgically.

When any animals with these types of problems arrive at the livestock market, the officiating veterinarian will contact the owner or their agent about the condition of the animal and work out the animal's disposition. The owner will have the right to remove the animal from the market within 12 hours of notification. If the animal is not removed by the owner, the veterinarian will humanely euthanize the animal and bill the owner for the cost of euthanasia and disposal. Prior to passage of this legislation, there was no other way to dispose of these compromised animals in a timely and humane manner. Enforcement of the act is under the jurisdiction of the Colorado Department of Agriculture and not the responsibility of the livestock markets. Several neighboring states are considering similar regulations.

Dairy farmers, for good reasons, focus on their cattle as milk, not beef, producers. However, the slaughterhouse is the inevitable destination for certain dairy cattle. The 1994 National Non-Fed Beef Quality Audit revealed that many cull cows and bulls are taken to slaughter too late to recoup their value. Producers often let animals go too long after diagnosis of a poorly responsive disease condition. If they are treated and do not respond, they should be sold when residues have cleared. If the animal is untreatable, they should be sold before they become debilitated. Greater numbers of producers are now asking their veterinarians to make more realistic predictions of the likelihood of treatment success and, prior to transport, evaluations of cull animals' likelihood to pass market inspection. These guidelines result in more humane treatment of the animals and profit for the producer. Take good care of your animals and they will take good care of you.