

Preparing deer for transport

It pays to prepare them well

Settled deer, in good body condition, tend to load and transport better.

It therefore pays to familiarise deer with humans, yards and being in small spaces. They'll cope better with transport.

This is particularly true for transporting fawns and hinds after weaning. If weaning has been done well, the weaners will be off to a better start and losses will be lower.

Keep deer in their age groups, with familiar animals, in the run-up to transport. If groups need to be mixed do this four or more days beforehand.

High levels of stress during yarding and transport can have a negative impact on venison tenderness, colour and eating experience. If you plan transport well in advance, it is more likely to run smoothly.

Slaughter deer need to be free of mud and faeces to meet food safety requirements and in order to be eligible for premium venison markets. Again, this takes planning, but it ensures the hard work and expense involved in raising the deer will be properly rewarded.

When engaging a transport operator, make sure they are accredited to the DeerQA Transport Quality Assurance Programme. This means they will have proper deer crates, the drivers will be trained and their operations will have been independently audited.

Before the truck arrives, check:

- Are the loading facilities ship-shape with no protruding nails, bolts or other objects that could injure people or animals?
- Is the load-out ramp free of holes or gaps where hooves and legs could be trapped?

Key points

- Good planning is the key to trouble-free deer transport.
- Check the rules relating to pregnant hinds, newly weaned deer, animal fitness and antler length.
- Ensure deer are clean in order to protect food safety and to be eligible for premium markets.
- Make sure your transport operator is DeerQA accredited.

Transporting newly-weaned deer

Perform any treatments (i.e. tagging, vaccinations) 7-10 days before the actual weaning while the fawns are still running with their mother. This means there will be much less stress on the day of weaning, which – apart from transport – will only involve separating fawns from hinds.

The DeerQA transport standard says it must not take more than six hours from the time hinds and fawns are yarded for weaning, to the time they arrive at their destinations. Otherwise, you will need to wait at least 10 days before transporting either weaned hinds or fawns.

Transporting deer to the DSP

In the paddock

Provide clean (non-muddy) pasture for deer to graze in the week before they are sent to the deer slaughter plant (DSP). If they are grazing winter crops or self-feed silage, move them off a week before, to allow mud or silage dags to dry and flake-off.

Your legal obligations

Please also read the *Deer Fact* 'Transporting deer within New Zealand'. This explains the animal welfare rules and regulations to do with deer transport.

In summary, do not transport:

- Deer that cannot bear weight on all four legs
- Pregnant hinds within 21 days before fawning (1 October cut-off)
- Stags or spikers with hard antler or velvet longer than 110 mm
- Newly-weaned fawns or hinds if it will take more than 6 hours from the time they arrive in the yards to the time they arrive at their destinations.



Photo: Jamie Ward

If deer are accustomed to the yards, race and shed, they will be easier to move and less stressed on the day of transport

Exclude deer from wallows in the week before slaughter, to reduce the chance of mud on their coats.

While a pre-slaughter wash at the DSP will remove some mud and faeces, it will not remove severe soiling. If a double wash is needed (the maximum allowed for animal welfare), the deer are unlikely to be eligible for premium prices as chilled venison. This can be a significant cost to the farmer.

In the yards

The biggest single contributor to things going wrong in the yards, especially with young deer, is overcrowding or lack of pen flow inside the shed. Draft large mobs into smaller groups in the holding yards (5-15 deer at a time – depending on internal pen size) before they enter the shed.

Never push or twist tails, as they break easily. This is inhumane and can lead to internal bleeding. If broken tails are detected at the DSP, an animal welfare complaint will be made.



Photo: Silver Fern Farms

Make sure deer are clean before they go to the DSP
Deer dags, mud and severe faecal stain pose major risks to food hygiene

Empty them out

Take deer off feed at least 4 hours before the truck arrives, to give them time to empty out. If deer are not emptied out, their coats could become contaminated with faeces. In severe cases, this may make them ineligible for processing because of the risk of carcase contamination.

Check:

- Are the Animal Status Declaration Forms completed, ready to go? You may be able to do this on your computer or your smart phone using the eASD app that was being trialled in 2018.
- Are any NAIT tags missing? Replace them if necessary.

When the truck backs up

Check that the truck deck is well aligned with the ramp. Cover any gaps between the ramp and truck sides.

Truck drivers still face challenges

David Wiering, Central Deer Freighters, says he has seen a big improvements during his 24 years in deer transport. Deer presentation standards are higher and stress levels are lower.



“But improvements can still be made in settling weaners better for transport,” he says. “We really notice stressed weaners. There’s more walking and panting. They don’t settle on the truck.”

To reduce the stress, he suggests farmers should tag and do any animal health treatments several days before transport, not on the same day.

Deer that can’t bear weight on four legs are another issue for truck drivers, Wiering says. “We are not legally allowed to transport deer in this condition, but we find it really difficult to identify them as they come up the ramp.”

He says it’s the farmer’s responsibility to remove these deer before loading.

More >>

Deer Code of Welfare

www.deernz.org/deerhub/regulatory-obligations/welfare

Deer Facts:

- Transporting deer within New Zealand
- Staying safe
- Best practice weaning management
- Effective deer handling

Videos:

<https://tinyurl.com/p2pvideos>

- Handling Elk-Wapiti video, David Lawrence (2016)
- Guide to Weaning Deer
- Body Condition Scoring