

# Effects of loading methods on welfare of rabbits transported to the slaughterhouse

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**Aim:** *The effect of different loading methods on welfare of rabbits transported to the slaughterhouse was investigated*

**MATERIALS**...A total of 384 rabbits, 82 days old, were transported from farm to the abattoir for a mean transport time of 100 min.

## ...and METHODS

...at farm, 192 rabbits were loaded on the truck in a smooth way (S) (rabbits from the farm crates were placed in a wide trolley and carried gently into the transport cages, at a density of 12 animals per cage). 192 rabbits were loaded in a rough way (R) (rabbits from farm crates were carried all together in the same trolley and loaded hurriedly into the transport cages).



...Blood samples from 80 male rabbits were collected before and after transport and analysed for haematological (haematocrit, white blood cells, neutrophils, lymphocytes) and biochemical parameters (glucose, total proteins, osmolality, corticosterone, aspartate amino transferase (AST), alanine amino transferase (ALT), creatine phosphokinase (CPK)).

**DISCUSSION** - Both groups independently from loading methods, showed a significant leukocytosis ( $P < 0.001$ ) with neutrophilia ( $P < 0.001$ ) and lymphocytopenia ( $P < 0.001$ ); a significant increase of AST (aspartate amino transferase) ( $P < 0.01$ ), ALT (alanine amino transferase) and CPK (creatin kinase) activities ( $P < 0.001$ ) was recorded. Glucose increased significantly after transport ( $P < 0.001$ ) as well as total proteins ( $P < 0.01$ ) and osmolality ( $P < 0.001$ ). The stress effect exerted by transport was evidenced by the significant upsurge of corticosterone serum concentration ( $P < 0.001$ ) and by the increasing ( $P < 0.001$ ) of the neutrophils/lymphocytes ratio recorded after transport.

## CONCLUSIONS

Haematological and biochemical data were not influenced by the different loading methods. Results obtained showed that stress parameters analyzed were more influenced by transport and handling itself rather than by the different loading methods on the truck.