

Trucking Vs. Trailing Cattle From Ranch to Railroad

This report was prepared with the assistance of a project of the W. P. A. The Jornada Experimental Range is a branch of the Southwestern Forest and Range Experiment Station and is located 23 miles northeast of Las Cruces, N. Mex. The S. W. F. & R. E. S. has headquarters at Tucson, Ariz., and is maintained by the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture for Arizona, New Mexico and the western third of Texas.

By FRED N. ARES, Superintendent, Jornada Experimental Range.

TRUCKS are being used more and more to replace the trail herd on the Jornada Experimental Range. Not only are trucks used to haul market-bound cattle to the railroad but small loading chutes have been built at strategic points on the range where calves are separated from the cows and hauled in light trailers to a central point, usually the headquarters ranch. There they are assembled, worked, and weighed with the minimum of handling and are finally picked up in huge semitrailer trucks and hauled to the railroad—50 to 60 head to the load, depending on the size of the animals.

Trucking bids fair to become the accepted method of transporting cattle between points not served by railroads. Trailing cattle for distances over heavily grazed public driveways with water at irregular intervals and little feed available has exacted a heavy toll from the producers who are not located near shipping points. Not only is there the expense of trailing the herd but the shrinkage in weight resulting from the hard drive amounts to an important financial item now that practically all cattle are sold by weight. This shrinkage has been found to reach as high as 15 per cent on measured drives of between 75- and 100-mile distances in Catron county of Western New Mexico. The shrinkage over the same routes by truck of the same class of livestock averaged only 5

per cent of the weight. For 400-pound calves or yearlings selling at 9 cents per pound this means, in dollars and cents, a difference of \$3.60 per head. The trucking cost over this route amounts to about \$1.00 per head for this class of livestock. After deducting the cost of hauling there is a net saving of around \$2.60 in favor of trucking.

The Jornada coöperator, B. A. Christmas, owns a ranch near Mimbres, N. Mex., which he operates in connection with the Jornada Experimental Range. The calves raised on the Mimbres ranch are moved to the Jornada in the fall, where they are fed and conditioned for market as yearlings the following spring or fall.

Since the ranches are located 133 miles apart, moving this livestock would be well-nigh impossible without the use of trucks. The trucking charge is \$2.00 per head for adult animals, and since nearly double the amount of calves can be hauled, the charge for these is only \$1.05 per head. This amounts to 30 cents per hundredweight, or 0.23 cents per mile per hundredweight as the calves average about 350 pounds when shipped. Shrinkage has been found to be 3 per cent, which, at current prices, would be 27 cents or a total shipping cost of 57 cents per hundredweight. Shrinkage in this case, however, is not a direct cost as would be the case if the calves were being hauled to market.

Trucking Weight Losses Less

Comparing a shorter haul under different road conditions, a recent charge for hauling 400-pound calves to the railroad from the Jornada headquarters was 37½ cents per head for the 23-mile trip. This amounted to 9.4 cents per hundredweight or 0.41 cents per mile per hundredweight. Since the weight shrinkage for this short trip was negligible, this constituted the total cost. Trailing, this trip used to require a full day over pretty rough terrain which resulted in considerable shrinkage. In sales of unweaned calves, the mother cows were always driven along and then returned the next day. The weight loss in calves was considerable, up to 5 per cent, but the greatest loss was incurred in the extra handling of the cows, usually in the late fall or winter when they were least able to regain the lost weight.

It follows then that trucking is a practical, economical, and safe means of transporting livestock from ranch to railroad shipping point. Practical because the large fleets of trucks and semitrailers especially made for this purpose can load and haul even a large herd to the nearest shipping point easily and in a very short time. It is economical because of the saving in time, labor, and most important, in weight shrinkage of the animals handled. It is safe because

liability for loss or damage in transit is assumed by all the chartered and responsible trucking companies.

As to trucking rates, obviously it is impossible for a trucking company to fix a flat rate of hauling which would cover all possible jobs. Comparing the instances given above, there exists a variation of 0.23 cents per mile per hundredweight for the long haul of 133 miles and a charge of 0.41 cents per mile per hundredweight for the shorter trip of 23 miles. In the first instance the haul was over roads mostly paved and well maintained, while the second trip was over largely unpaved and poorly maintained roads. This means that the truck line operator and livestock producer must get together and work out a separate rate covering each hauling job. This rate will be determined by distance of haul, number and kind of stock handled, condition of roads, loading facilities, and other factors.

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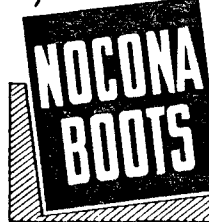


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