Calf wellbeing – getting ready for the road

> People around the world are increasingly interested in how their food is produced, including the quality of life experienced by the animals who produce it. Lately, we've seen the spotlight shift to the treatment of dairy calves.

We know Fonterra farmers are passionate about calf wellbeing and put a huge amount of effort into giving the best care – whether their calves are on-farm for a long time or just a few days.

When it comes time to leave the home farm, New Zealand law sets some minimum requirements to protect calves during transport. For example, calves can only travel once they are at least 4 full days of age and can only be transported for a maximum of 12 hours.

At the time these regulations were put in place, they were similar to those of other comparable countries around the world.
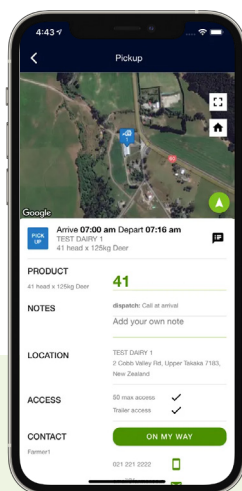
Recently, we've seen some countries and global dairy competitors make changes to their calf transport requirements. These include increasing the minimum age for transport (10 days in the UK, 28 days in Germany) and reducing the maximum travel time (8 hours in the UK and EU).

While we're not aware of any major changes to the calf transport requirements here in New Zealand in the short-term, this recent global interest is a good reminder that we have some valuable tools to help us protect the wellbeing of calves being transported. Speaking with your vet, farm consultant or calf nutrition advisor is another great way to get support.

There are lots of tools and resources about calf care and transport available online – including from NZAgbiz (nzagbiz.co.nz/nz/en/animals/calves), Dairy NZ (dairynz.co.nz/animal/calves), and MPI (mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare) Speaking with your vet, farm consultant or calf nutrition advisor is another great way to get support.

A relatively new option within the 'calf transport toolbox' are the livestock transport apps. These apps are proving useful for farmers by giving an easier, clearer method of communication with their meat processor and related livestock carriers.

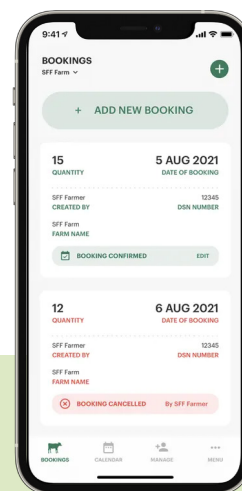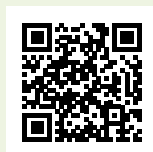Two of the most popular apps are offered by M2X and Silver Fern Farms.

M2X App

M2X is a New Zealand based company passionate about using smart technology and optimisation to reduce costs and unlock operational efficiencies in transporting freight.

The app allows farmers and their staff to book bobby calf transport directly off their farm on their scheduled transport days. Pinpoint accuracy of their calf shed gives carriers accuracy on pick up locations, reducing wasted kilometres and time taken to load for both the driver and the farmer.

The technology was built alongside farmers, so it's fit for purpose – easy to set up and simple to use. Traditional systems where farmers communicate with their processor by putting out a flag, phoning through or sending a text, lead to inefficiencies in transport distances, fuel usage and operator time.

Silver Fern Farms App

The Silver Fern Farms Calf Booking App is another system that farmers can use to book in their bobby calves for collection, rather than through the traditional ways. The app also allows processing plants to plan and manage capacity.

The Calf Booking App offers a self-service approach for farmers, who can make a booking, manage staff and their access, and see pickup schedules for the region, all in one handy tool. This gives Silver Fern Farms an accurate view of the daily calf processing numbers for the first time ever – a new requirement from MPI.