

October 17, 2009

Mary Beth Sweetland  
Director of Investigations  
Humane Society of the United States  
2100 L Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Mary Beth,

Dr. Grandin and I have reviewed the videos that you sent. Our comments follow the introduction that you requested.

I am a Ph.D. student under Dr. Temple Grandin in the Animal Sciences department at Colorado State University. Before enrolling at Colorado State University, I earned a Master of Science Degree in Animal Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. My research pertained to the effects of water access on the well being and carcass characteristics of Holstein slaughter cows. I was raised on a dairy farm and have been involved with dairy farming for my entire life. As a result, I have extensive experience in neonatal dairy calf care and handling. I have worked closely with several meat packing companies to troubleshoot livestock handling and stunning issues. While at the University of Wisconsin, I served as the interim Meat Science Laboratory Manager. In this role, I was responsible for coordinating and performing slaughter and processing of cattle, pigs, and lambs. Dr. Grandin and I have reviewed the videos of veal calf slaughter and handling practices collected by HSUS. I am including Dr. Grandin's comments in this letter.

We reviewed the slaughter and stunning footage first. It must be acknowledged that the facility appeared to be clean and well-maintained. In addition, the pneumatic stunner used to stun calves for the slaughter line appeared to be very effective in rendering the calves unconscious with a single well-placed blow. The stunner operator was also very accurate. Judging from the footage of the stunning operations within the plant, the plant would have likely passed an audit of stunning accuracy following the American Meat Institute guideline of 95% or more of the animals rendered unconscious on the first shot.

Three deficiencies were observed in the slaughter and stunning video. First, the plant was careless in checking sensibility of stunned calves. It is normal to observe spinal reflex movements (kicking and leg movement) following stunning. The primary indicator of sensibility on the part of the stunned animal is the head. During the video, we paid specific attention to eyelid movement and rhythmic breathing. Flopping movement of the head associated with kicking is not a righting reflex. The defining characteristic of a righting reflex is a sustained backward arching of the neck. No definitive righting reflexes were observed in the video. Scenes eight and ten showed rhythmic breathing on the part of the brown calf. The calf should have been restunned when rhythmic breathing was first observed. Scene 12 showed the beginning of skinning procedures on a calf that was likely sensible. The calf showed more kicking and body movement than is normally observed from spinal reflexes. Performing slaughter procedures on a sensible animal is a very serious violation of the Humane Slaughter Act. During Scene 21, a vocalization was heard from one of the shackled calves during exsanguination. The calf that vocalized was definitely sensible. In scene 22, eyelid movement was observed

from calf #859, indicating a high likelihood of sensibility on the part of the calf. The second deficiency was too many calves in the stun pen at once, which caused congestion of the stunning pen as calves were stunned. The third deficiency was the cartridge-fired captive bolt gun. Two misfires were observed, which could have been due to poor maintenance or wet cartridges.

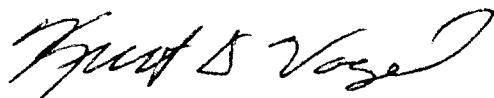
The handling video showed several concerning deficiencies. Electric prods were used as the primary handling aids in most of the video clips. A high enough percentage of calves were prodded in the video clips that we viewed to conclude that the plant would have failed the electric prod usage portion of the AMI Animal Welfare Audit. A plant fails the audit if greater than 25% of animals are electrically prodded. Additionally, electric prods were commonly used in an abusive manner to force nonambulatory calves to rise. This is unacceptable and should not continue. It is unacceptable to allow workers to kick calves to make them rise as we observed in scenes 19 and 21. This is a definite act of abuse that would lead to an automatic failure of the American Meat Institute Animal Welfare Audit and subsequent supplier delisting. Calves that are too weak to stand and walk that arrive at the plant should be euthanized. It appears that this particular plant is not conducting effective training and enforcement of humane animal handling.

The stocking density of the pen shown in scene 9 is too high. All animals should have room to lie down without lying on top of each other when held overnight. This pen was clearly overfilled if the calves were held overnight. In addition, the stocking density of the trailers appeared to be too high as well. Calves that laid down during shipping were stepped on by other calves on the trailer during shipping. It is important to allow enough space for weak animals to lie down if necessary during shipping.

Handling very young calves is a difficult task as many of them are too weak to ship at the age shown in this video. Many of the calves shown in the videos should not have left the farm at such a young age as they were too weak to withstand shipping and nearly impossible to handle in a humane manner at the plant.

We would like to make it very clear that the conditions and acts shown in the videos that we received were not as severe as those shown in the Westland-Hallmark investigation in 2007-2008. However, the handling practices and attention to insensibility in this plant are unacceptable and must improve.

Sincerely,



Kurt Vogel, M.S.

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