

*Testimony
Of
Temple Grandin*

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***“After the Beef Recall: Exploring Greater
Transparency in the Meat Industry”***

I have worked for over 30 years to improve the treatment of animals at slaughter plants. Half the cattle and 25% of the pigs are handled in facilities I have designed. One of my biggest frustrations throughout my career has been getting people to manage and operate my equipment correctly. Good equipment provides the tools that make humane calm handling of animals possible, but it must be combined with good management. The recent video of dairy cows being tortured with a forklift made me sick. The abuse of cattle at this plant was 100% caused by a lack of employee supervision and a complete failure of the USDA inspectors. The Humane Slaughter Act prohibits dragging of crippled animals, and it was not enforced.

Over the years the biggest problem I have observed with the USDA is inconsistency and great variation on how different inspectors enforce humane slaughter regulations. One will be super strict to the point of being totally unreasonable and another might be totally lax. Part of the problem is that with the exception of the regulation on dragging crippled animals, many of the other regulations are vague and subject to different interpretations. Inspectors need better training and clear directives to improve consistency. It is impossible for different inspectors to be consistent when vague terminology is used such as “unnecessary pain and suffering.”

The present system of USDA inspection is like having traffic police giving out speeding tickets when they think cars are speeding. Police departments are able to enforce the speed limits in a uniform manner because the officer MEASURES a car's speed with radar. The decision to pull a car over is based on a measurement, not subjective judgment of speed. For other traffic rules such as being in the wrong lane, the rules are very clearly written so that the officers will interpret them the same way.

When standards and regulations are being written, there are two types of standards. The first are practices that are simply prohibited such as dragging crippled downer animals. The second type are animal based outcome standards where percentage based numerical scoring is very effective. For example, the percentage of animals that fall during handling can be caused by either a slick floor or rough handling by people. Falling is an outcome of bad equipment, poorly trained people, or very weak cows that should have never been brought to the plant. Measuring the percentage of cows that fall at a plant is a sensitive indicator of three different types of problems. The percentage of cattle falling can never be zero, so falling cannot be banned, but it should be kept at a very low level.

In 1996 I was hired by USDA to do a survey of slaughter plants to determine how well animals were handled and stunned. Stunning is the process where animals are rendered unconscious before slaughter procedures. Instead of just doing a subjective evaluation, numerical scoring was used for the evaluation of 24 beef, pork, and veal plants in 10 different states. The numerical scoring system that is now the American Meat Institute guideline was developed during my USDA funded survey. In each plant, I observed 100 animals and they were scored on the following variables.

1. Percentage of animals stunned properly with one application of the stunner.
2. Percentage rendered insensible prior to hoisting to the bleed rail. For regulatory purposes this must be 100%.
3. Percentage falling during handling.
4. Percentage moved with an electric prod.
5. Percentage vocalizing (moos, bellows or squeal) in the stunning area. Vocalization is a sensitive measure of distress and pain. In 1996, the worst plant had 35% of the cows vocalizing. Today the best plants have 0 to 3% vocalizing.

The survey results showed that there were many problems. Only 30% of the plants could stun 95% of cattle correctly. The biggest problem was equipment maintenance. Today, the best plants can stun 97% to 98% of the cattle correctly with one captive bolt shot. Animals that are missed are immediately reshot. This scoring system became the basis of the American Meat Institute Animal Handling Guidelines that I authored. It is being used by major restaurant chains to audit animal welfare of their suppliers. www.animalhandling.org. The advantage of using numbers is that it prevents practices from slowly deteriorating with nobody realizing it. I have seen this happen many times with the USDA. There will be a big crisis and a big crackdown. Since the enforcement is subjective, old bad practices have a way of slowly returning. McDonald's, Wendy's, and Burger King have been using the numerical scoring system for nine years. This has resulted in great improvements. The Hallmark, Westland plant where the atrocious treatment of cows occurred, does not supply these three companies. The conditions at this plant are a horrible black eye for the industry. The many plant managers who are doing a good job were sickened.

I recommend that the USDA adopt numerical scoring to make enforcement of the Humane Slaughter Act more uniform and to uphold higher standards. Many progressive inspectors are already informally using it. For the practices that are prohibited, a handbook of very clear guidelines is needed for enforcement. It would list prohibited practices where there is a zero tolerance. The AMI guideline prohibits acts of abuse and they are listed in the guide. There may be disagreements about where the critical limits should be set for acceptable scores with numerical scoring. That may need to be discussed. When slaughter plants are required to maintain certain numerical scores, it prevents them from slowly shifting back to bad practices.

When McDonald's, Wendy's, and Burger King first started using the scoring system, there were very little differences between announced and unannounced audits. Acts of animal abuse often occurred while an auditor was watching because the plant manager thought he was just doing normal practice. Bad had become normal. During the last few years slaughter plants now fall into two categories: 1) The plants where they always have good animal handling and stunning practices even when nobody is watching and 2) The plants where they behave properly when they are being watched and abusive treatment of livestock occurs when nobody is around watching. This separation of slaughter plants into two categories occurred because now plant management knows what they are supposed to do.

My Experiences with Video Cameras

In the 1980's, one of my client plants installed a video camera over the pig chutes that led to the stunner. A TV monitor was installed in the manager's office. This greatly improved pig handling and reduced electric prod use. More recently I have been in beef plants that had their own internal video system. I collected data on electric prod use both standing where people could see me and with the video camera. Prod use was higher when viewed through the video, but it was still lower compared to the bad old days before the restaurants started doing audits. Observations indicate that handling seems to be more variable than beef stunning. The reason for this is that effective captive bolt stunning is so dependent on equipment maintenance.

My most recent experience with video cameras in meat plants has been with Arrowsight. They hired me on a retainer to assist them in developing a video camera system where third party auditors can audit a plant through a secure internet link. One plant, EPL Foods in Augusta, Georgia has installed it. This is the old Shapiro plant.

Concluding Statement

There is a certain segment of the meat industry that behaves badly when no one is watching. This segment will need more eyes watching either by video or people. There is also a need for better training of USDA inspectors and clear directives where vague terminology is avoided. I strongly recommend numerical scoring. I am proud of the systems I have designed. When they are operated correctly, the animals calmly walk in and death is painless. I have taken many non-industry people through beef plants. They are amazed at how calm the cattle remain. The most common comment is: "It's not as bad as I thought it would be" or "it's cleaner and neater than I expected."