

December 6, 2004

Rabbi Menachem Genack
Rabbinic Administrator
Orthodox Union

Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
Executive Vice President
Orthodox Union

Dear Rabbis Genack and Weinreb:

I am writing to you on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), our 800,000 members and supporters, and the millions of Americans and others around the world who were horrified to learn that the OU has allowed the shocking cruelty that we discovered at the AgriProcessors slaughterhouse in Iowa.

While we are pleased at your willingness to talk about these issues, we are stunned by Rabbi Genack's comments to the media that "he had discussed the issue with USDA officials, and is confident that government guidelines are being followed satisfactorily" (JTA, *et al.*), that the video shows "reflex reactions, like chickens with their heads cut off," and that the footage "does not necessarily demonstrate pain to the animal" (*The Forward, et al.*).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture assures us that far from agreeing that all is well at AgriProcessors, it has launched an investigation into the plant. The argument that these animals—who are walking around with their throats hanging open—are unconscious is indefensible, as Rabbi Weinreb agreed on Nachum Segal's December 2 program.

It appears that you are both unaware of the full extent of the cruelty. For example, based on his statements to Mr. Segal, Rabbi Weinreb appears to have watched only a few moments of the video (one of the many bad shechitahs). Our investigation took place over seven weeks, not seven months, and the cruelty that we witnessed was perpetrated against every single animal whose slaughter we witnessed. In fact, the unedited videos indicate that all the animals had their esophagi and tracheas ripped out within a few seconds of shechitah (so they would all have been conscious at the time) and that fully one-fourth of them showed clear signs of consciousness after they had been dumped onto the floor. Many of the animals were shocked in the face with electric prods, and all of them were slaughtered in an atmosphere that Dr. Grandin says would be terrifying for them. These conditions are standard at AgriProcessors.

As you rightly note, PETA is an animal rights organization and we promote vegetarianism, but our goal with AgriProcessors and the OU—as has been the case with many of our largest campaigns—is to improve the dying conditions for these



PETA

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TO PROTECTING
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animals. We can't stop all animals from being slaughtered, but we can do our best to make sure that they are slaughtered in accordance with basic legal requirements and, in this case, with the statements of assurance from the OU and AgriProcessors' attorney that the slaughter is as humane as possible.

As you know, we contacted representatives of AgriProcessors in May 2003 and wrote them a letter in June asking that they agree to work quietly with Dr. Temple Grandin to clean up their practices. Had they agreed—rather than telling us that there was nothing to worry about and then failing to respond to our November 2003 letter—this whole situation could have been avoided. In any event, we are pleased to learn from Rabbi Genack that he spoke at length with Dr. Grandin on Friday and that he will be visiting AgriProcessors.

Please know that we agree with the OU's stance that shechitah is not supposed to be worse than standard slaughter. We assume, based on Rabbi Weinreb's statement that the throat-slitting at AgriProcessors is "especially inhumane [and] generally unacceptable," that the OU will require AgriProcessors to immediately abandon that procedure. Please confirm this interpretation.

PETA knows that shechitah is supposed to quickly render the animal insensible to pain: The chief rabbinate of Israel told the *Jerusalem Post* that it normally takes 30 seconds to a minute for the cow to lose consciousness if shechitah is done properly. Others have suggested 20 to 30 seconds. We were therefore encouraged by Rabbi Weinreb's comments to Nachum Segal that shechitah "is designed to have the animal bleed and expire as quickly as possible. We have to look to see what can be done to ensure within the Halachic system the humane treatment of animals ... We do have certain responsibilities, and we'll live up to them." With that in mind, we respectfully ask that the OU do the following:

First, quite obviously, the OU must clean up AgriProcessors. It would be a good start to require that AgriProcessors stop ripping apart live animals. But the OU absolutely must, based on its own Web statements that shechitah is "a painless ritual" and that it causes "instantaneous death with no pain to the animal," require that the plant get rid of its electric-shock prods, that the plant atmosphere be analyzed by Dr. Grandin to make it less stressful for the animals, and that animals be neither touched nor moved until after they are dead.

All AgriProcessors shochets should undergo training in creating a calm atmosphere for the cattle and recognizing the physiological signs of consciousness—blinking, bellowing, standing, rhythmic breathing, and attempting to right their heads—to ensure that animals are respected and that no animals are touched or moved until they are unconscious. Animals who are not rendered quickly insensible by shechitah should be stunned via captive-bolt gun. All equipment must be inspected to ensure that it is not harming animals (e.g., conveyor belts should not trap chickens and break their legs).

As you know from speaking with Dr. Grandin, the Facoima pen terrifies the animals. We were heartened to learn from the first *New York Times* story that the OU prefers the ASPCA pen for kosher slaughter. It should be required that the kindest methods of slaughter available be used—please, require the use of this ASPCA pen at AgriProcessors. Please require that AgriProcessors hire Dr. Grandin to help the plant improve its practices. Please also require that AgriProcessors

install a video surveillance system that can be monitored by Dr. Grandin or that Dr. Grandin be hired to conduct periodic unannounced audits.

Next, in order for the statements on its Web site about *tsaar baalei chayim* and painless slaughter to be taken seriously, the OU must institute explicit and publicly available guidelines for the humane treatment of animals in all slaughterhouses that it certifies. These guidelines should require the above improvements for all OU-certified slaughterhouses, especially the commitment to train shochets in recognizing the physiological signs of consciousness—blinking, bellowing, standing, rhythmic breathing, and attempting to right the head—to ensure that animals' lives are respected and that no animals are touched or moved until they are unconscious.

Recognizing that there is a problem is preferable to denying it, of course. But these animals were treated in ways that may warrant felony cruelty-to-animals charges. This was in gross violation of both federal and kosher laws—as well as basic human decency—and it happened on the OU's watch. It is time for serious corrective action and the drafting of a specific OU policy to make sure that these horrors never happen again.

We are happy to work with the OU in any way that you think might be useful, but we're also happy to step aside—once you've committed to making the above changes—and allow you to work with Dr. Grandin, whom you know to be a “friend of shechitah,” and move forward. We look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Friedrich". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "B".

Bruce G. Friedrich
Director of Vegan Campaigns

