

PETA's Letter to Kandiyohi County Attorney Boyd Beccue

**November 18, 1999**

Kandiyohi County Attorney Boyd Beccue  
County Attorney's Building  
316 SW 4th Street  
P.O. Box 1126  
Willmar, Minnesota 56201

RE: Treatment of animals at Crestview Farm, New London:  
Request for prosecutorial action

Dear Mr. Beccue:

We respectfully request your office's urgent attention and action in the matter of conduct engaged in at Crestview Farm, in New London, Kandiyohi County, on October 27 and November 4, 1999. On these dates, activities that appear to constitute grave and repeated violations of Minnesota anti-cruelty statutes, and of the New London anti-cruelty ordinance, took place on premises located at 15560 Highway 71 in New London, within and around a building operated by Crestview Farm, a property of Willmar Poultry Company.

A first-generation copy of the original videographic record of the conduct with regard to which we request your action is enclosed for your review. For your convenience, a short videotape that presents a sampling of the activities documented on the unedited tapes covering October 27 and November 4 is also enclosed. Please be assured that the maker of the original videographic record is available and willing to authenticate the videos, and to cooperate with your office, and those of associated law enforcement authorities, in any way needed for the processing, investigation, and prosecution of this complaint.

On the dates in question, the manager of Crestview Farm undertook the killing and disposal of a large number of a flock of approximately 12-week old turkeys in and around the building in which these turkeys are generally being housed and reared until they are old enough to be transported elsewhere for slaughter. The building in question is not a poultry dressing establishment, and is not otherwise dedicated to, or equipped for, the commercial or custom slaughter of turkeys. It is, moreover, our understanding that the turkeys targeted on October 27 and November 4 were disposed of because they were lame, injured, suffering from infection by pneumovirus, or otherwise unsuitable for slaughter and consumption, an understanding confirmed by these animals' ultimate disposal in a pit located on Crestview Farm.

As you will see in the accompanying videos, bludgeoning with a metal pipe was the primary method by which the manager attempted to kill those turkeys who showed signs of illness or injury. We are advised that the pipe used in this procedure is referred to, by the manager, as a "killing stick." In certain instances, a single blow to a targeted animal was insufficient to render him immobile and unconscious, and additional blows were then administered. In no instance was a turkey restrained or positioned before bludgeoning began, and blows were, thus, variously

delivered to turkeys' heads, necks, shoulders, wings, and spines. Blows often evoked frantic, purposeful movements, including flapping of wings and attempts to flee. In at least one instance, the bludgeoning of a turkey was so ineffectual in producing unconsciousness that the turkey in question remained standing after the blow.

After animals were bludgeoned, they were thrown towards the center of the building for later collection. From the building center, some birds were thrown to locations where piles of dead and dying birds were forming, and all were eventually tossed into a wheel barrow for eventual transfer out of the building. The chests of some of the bludgeoned turkeys were still visibly heaving with regular breath when these birds were gathered from the center of the building and thrown on to piles.

As the manager coursed the center of the building to collect bludgeoned animals into the wheel barrow, he occasionally discovered sick and injured birds who had been overlooked during the bludgeoning session. Neck-wringing was used to kill these animals, because, by this time, the "killing stick" had already been stored away for the day. In some instances, the manager would kick these birds to see if they would stir, and when they did, even struggling to right themselves, the manager hoisted them off the ground and wrung their necks, sometimes by twisting, and sometimes by hyperextension. In at least one case, a turkey whose neck had been wrung continued to struggle and flap his wings as he was thrown into a wheel barrow.

In one instance, the manager dispatched a turkey who was found disabled, but still able to hold his neck and head up, by striking him with a pair of pliers he happened to be wearing on his belt.

Because the animals were not removed from the rearing facility before being bludgeoned and subjected to neck-wringing, all the killing and throwing were conducted in full view of the other turkeys in this rearing facility, who can be seen, in the videos, fleeing from the path of the manager as he wends his way through the flock.

Ultimately, the turkeys were moved from the building and thrown into the shovel attachment of a tractor equipped with a dump mechanism. Because, even at this advanced stage of the process, no steps had been taken to verify that the turkeys were dead or unconscious, at least one bludgeoned turkey was loaded into the dump shovel while so obviously alert that he was able to lift his head and neck on his own, blink his eyes, flap his wings, vocalize, and stretch his legs in a frantic effort to crawl away. He was then transported to the burial pit in this fully conscious and struggling condition, sharing his space with many other dying and dead birds.

This profoundly disturbing sequence of events is documented very closely in the accompanying videos. The nature and extent of the suffering caused to the turkeys by the conduct captured in the videos is, in addition, detailed in the accompanying statement of Professor Ian Duncan, an avian agriculture scientist who was given the opportunity to view the videographic evidence. A synopsis of the legal analysis we believe applies to the conduct in this case is also enclosed for your consideration.

After you have had a chance to review our materials, we sense you will agree that 1) the cruel battering and maiming of sick and injured animals by use of substandard killing methods that are

incapable of providing a humane death, 2) the violent handling of animals maimed by ineffective and substandard killing methods, and 3) the vehicular transport of piles of animals that included one or more who had survived maiming by substandard killing methods, caused animals unnecessary and unjustifiable pain and suffering, and therefore constituted torture and cruel transportation punishable under Sections 343.21 subd. 1 and 343.24 subd. 1(b) of the Minnesota Statutes, and Section 1401.03(1) of the New London city ordinances.

Accordingly, and in light of the fact that the conduct documented in our materials involves a sequence of repeated violations of the above-cited provisions, we ask that you direct the steps necessary for opening a prosecution for multiple gross misdemeanors, as these are defined at Minnesota Statute Section 343.21 subd. 9. In addition, we request that you direct appropriate authorities to determine whether officials of the Willmar Poultry Company had sufficient involvement in the activities engaged in at Crestview Farm on October 27 and November 4 to render them accountable as accessories to the violations of the specified anti-cruelty provisions, pursuant to Minnesota Statute Section 609.05.

Thanking you for your attention, and hoping for the opportunity to assist you further in this serious matter, we look forward to your response.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Beth Sweetland, Director

Research, Investigations & Rescue Department