

ON AGRIPROCESSORS KOSHER CONTROVERSY AND SHACKLING AND HOISTING

From the Rabbinical Assembly of the Conservative Movement:

The disturbing video that People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) produced of incidents during shehitah (Jewish ritual animal slaughter) at the AgriProcessors' plant in Postville, Iowa should be regarded as a welcome, though unfortunate service to the Jewish community. It is a service precisely because the scenes recorded are not what shehitah should be, nor does it correspond to the Jewish way of treating animals, even at the time of their slaughter. The uproar within the Jewish community over the videos is proof that those who observe kashrut are serious about the humane treatment of animals. When a company purporting to be kosher violates the prohibition against tza'ar ba'alei hayyim, causing pain to one of God's living creatures, that company must answer to the Jewish community, and ultimately, to God.

There are a variety of means used to prepare an animal for shehitah, and our Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) has criticized a number of them. In 2000, the CJLS unanimously approved a teshuvah (response to a question of Jewish law), written by Rabbis Elliot N. Dorff and Joel Roth, in which the shackling and hoisting of animals in preparation for shehitah was ruled a violation of tza'ar ba'alei hayyim. The teshuvah encourages all kosher processing plants to abandon that procedure and upgrade to more humane pens to secure an animal for slaughter. Such humane pens do not include the Facomia Pen or the Weinberg Pen, both of which are inconsistent with our understanding of what it means to humanely treat an animal. The AgriProcessor plant of Postville, Iowa uses the Facomia pen and the PETA video captures exactly what the teshuvah of 2000 indicates, that this pen violates the prohibition against tza'ar ba'alei hayyim.

The Rabbinical Assembly applauds the Orthodox Union (OU) for its quick response to the video and its allegations. According to Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, Executive Vice President of the OU, a review of shehitah procedures at AgriProcessors is now taking place and an OU supervisor has been placed on duty to assure that procedures assuring kashrut and the humane treatment of animals are followed. We hope that with this review, the OU will demand that the facilities it supervises install pens that meet modern scientific animal welfare/humane handling requirements such as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) pen which we regard as a humane animal securing device, but not excluding other equally humane technological options.

Those who are charged with supervising the production of kosher meat are engaged in a sacred task. We are certain that they agree with us that the humane treatment of the animal is key to the Jewish approach toward life. In keeping with our CJLS teshuvah of 2000, we urge all those involved in shehitah to invest in and install those technologies that assure that the animal's life is terminated speedily and with the humanity that Jewish law demands.

Rabbi Perry Raphael Rank
President, The Rabbinical Assembly