

November 29, 2004

Abraham Rubashkin, President
AgriProcessors, Inc.
220 West St.
Postville, IA 52162

Dear Mr. Rubashkin:

We write today with evidence of cruelty to animals at your Postville, Iowa, slaughterhouse. As you know, we received reports of inhumane treatment of animals at this facility and wrote to you on June 18, 2003. We received a reply from your attorney, claiming that at AgriProcessors, “Kosher slaughter is being conducted in accordance with the letter and spirit of Jewish law, which prescribes the most humane treatment of animals that has been known throughout human history.”

The footage that we obtained during our recent investigation at AgriProcessors proves that this claim is false. As you will see on the videotape, standard practices at your slaughterhouse include ripping the tracheas out of animals’ bodies while they are still alive, desperate attempts by animals to stand up after being dumped from the restraining device, writhing of fully conscious animals in pools of their own blood, and kicking blood into the eyes of dying animals.

AgriProcessors’ current operations violate both the Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act (HMLSA) and Halcha. The HMLSA requires that cattle be “rendered insensible to pain” before they are shackled, hoisted, or cut. Kosher law requires that the “trachea and esophagus of the animal are severed with a special razor-sharp, perfectly smooth blade, causing instantaneous death with no pain to the animal” (The Orthodox Union).

We ask that you immediately adopt the six recommendations described below to help prevent these cruel acts from continuing.

Recommendation #1: Immediately stop removing the trachea or any other internal parts from conscious cattle.

Dismembering animals while they are still conscious causes extreme pain and suffering and should *never* be practiced.

Dr. Temple Grandin, a recognized expert in all aspects of slaughter of farmed animals, including kosher slaughter, and advisor to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and American Meat Institute, reviewed the footage and commented that she had never come across this “atrocious” procedure in any of the 30 kosher slaughterhouses she has visited. She concluded:



PETA

PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

501 FRONT ST.
NORFOLK, VA 23510
757-622-PETA
757-622-0457 (FAX)

PETA.org
Info@peta.org

AN INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATION DEDICATED
TO PROTECTING
THE RIGHTS OF ALL ANIMALS

Removal of the trachea and other internal parts before the animal has become insensible would cause great suffering and pain. Many of the cattle on this tape had this dressing procedure performed when they were still fully sensible. Several cattle were walking around with the trachea and other parts hanging out of them. To provide an acceptable level of welfare the animals **MUST** be allowed to become fully insensible after shehita before any dressing procedure is done ... **ALL** cattle must be completely insensible before trachea removal or any other skinning procedure is conducted. Shehita (religious slaughter) is the **ONLY** procedure that can be conducted on a sensible animal. ... In conclusion, many of the cattle that had their trachea removed were fully conscious and fully sensible. The duration of complete sensibility was probably prolonged by the pain of having their inner tissues cut and pulled ...

There can be no justification for this practice. We ask that any dismembering or cutting aside from shechita be prohibited on the kill floor.

Recommendation #2: End the use of the Facoima pen, and instead, adopt a more humane restraining device that keeps conscious animals upright at all times.

Experts in kosher slaughter agree that the act of turning conscious animals upside-down for shechita as is done at your facility causes great stress, as evidenced in the footage by the cries of animals inside the restraining device. The stress and the resulting noise of the frightened animals make it almost impossible to determine if shechita is being performed properly. In pens that hold cattle securely in an upright position, there is relative calm and quiet so that the shochet and others can easily tell if there is a misstep in the act of shechita.

During a conference earlier this year, Dr. Joe Regenstein, professor of food science and head of Cornell University's Kosher Food Initiative, argued that turning an animal upside-down during slaughter is "unacceptable" and that the Facoima pen used by AgriProcessors is similarly "unacceptable" on welfare grounds. Dr. Regenstein also cited a study by Rushen showing that animals prefer upright restraint. The American Meat Institute has also issued guidelines that animals should be kept in an upright position during slaughter for welfare reasons. Humane slaughter regulations in the United Kingdom require that cattle be kept in an upright position at all times in an approved restraining pen during religious slaughter. Upright restraint devices are readily accepted for kosher certification. Such devices are also readily available and, according to Grandin, can usually "be easily installed in one weekend with minimum disruption of plant operations."

Recommendation #3: Always keep animals inside the restraining device until they are rendered unconscious.

Operators of the restraint device at your facility dump still-conscious animals onto the kill floor where they often hit their heads on bloody concrete before struggling to their feet. As you can see in the video, the animals fall, writhe in pools of blood, and violently thrash against equipment. Operators should always hold the animals inside the device until they lose consciousness following shechita. Experts agree that doing so will alleviate a great deal of

suffering. In fact, humane slaughter regulations in the United Kingdom require that cattle not be moved prior to unconsciousness and never be moved before a period 30 seconds has expired after bleeding.

Recommendation #4: Institute a policy that requires animals who are not rapidly rendered unconscious by shechita, as required by law, to be immediately rendered unconscious with a captive-bolt gun.

Our footage shows animals who experience prolonged pain and suffering after shechita as they remain conscious, often with their tracheas dangling from their necks, for minutes—more than three minutes in one case. In fact, by observing the animals in the video for scientifically acknowledged indicators of consciousness such as walking, standing, righting reflexes, eye blinking, vocalization, and rhythmic breathing, we found that at least 25 percent of the 278 cattle who were videotaped being slaughtered remained conscious for a significant period of time after shechita was performed.

Drs. Grandin and Regenstein wrote, “Observations indicate that calm cattle lose consciousness more rapidly and ... [c]alm cattle will usually collapse within 10 to 15 seconds.” Any animal who remains conscious for more than 20 seconds should be immediately rendered insensible to pain with a captive-bolt gun to prevent further suffering. While this may mean that the animal’s carcass would not qualify as kosher, we understand that AgriProcessors has a significant nonkosher customer base to which it could still sell the meat.

Recommendation #5: Hire independent welfare experts to properly train workers in handling and slaughter techniques and implement video surveillance and unannounced welfare audits.

Rough handling was well documented at AgriProcessors and resulted in further stress as evidenced by unacceptable levels of cattle vocalization. Electric prods are overused and even used on the face of animals.

Dr. Grandin wrote that the Postville plant “has some serious cattle handling and restraint problems. About 50 percent of the cattle were vocalizing during handling and restraint. This is due to bad practices such as using an electric prod to position the animal’s head in the head holder. In a well-run kosher plant, the percentage of cattle that would vocalize during handling and restraint would be 5 percent.”

A flagrant disregard for the welfare and dignity of animals at AgriProcessors is clearly demonstrated by the shochet, as he was caught on tape kicking blood into the faces of dying cattle. Other handling problems may be the result of badly designed or maintained machinery. In several scenes, chickens are shown with their legs and other body parts, including one’s head, painfully stuck in a gap on the conveyor belt. This leads to excruciating pain from having body parts crushed.

All these problems can be addressed by hiring independent handling and slaughter experts who can recommend the following: better equipment that will not trap birds, upright restraining

devices for cattle, non-aversive handling aids such as “rattle paddles” instead of electric prods, and captive-bolt guns for use on animals who aren’t rendered rapidly unconscious by shechita. They can also train employees on more humane methods of using equipment and ensuring that slaughter is always conducted in the most proper manner according to Jewish law.

Videotaped monitoring of key handling and slaughter areas in the plant is also essential as it has been shown that the mere presence of cameras has an inherent corrective effect on behavior. The footage from such monitoring could also be used by independent experts to evaluate practices. Unannounced audits, to ensure that these improvements are actually being realized, are also an absolute must.

Recommendation #6: Require and ensure that all meat suppliers to AgriProcessors follow the same strict policies specified herein.

We have read reports about serious welfare problems at kosher slaughterhouses in Uruguay, which is allegedly a source of meat for AgriProcessors. One published account describes live animals’ falling hard onto a blood-covered floor and struggling after being shackled and hoisted. This was reported as a daily occurrence there.

It is not enough to make animal welfare improvements at AgriProcessors. The company must be responsible for the treatment of the animals who die in suppliers’ slaughterhouses as well. It is essential that AgriProcessors demand that such facilities follow at least the same policies specified above—including banning the dismembering of live animals, requiring the use of an upright restraining device that holds animals until they are unconscious and a captive-bolt gun to render animals insensible to pain after improper shechita, and the implementation of independent welfare audits with videotaped monitoring.

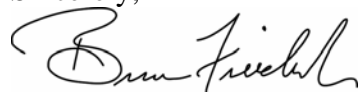
Urgent Need for Strong Measures

Since AgriProcessors is legally obliged to abide by federal statutes regarding humane slaughter, we have presented this case to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We believe that the atrocities we documented could and should have been easily avoided.

While nothing will change the suffering documented on our videotape—the same suffering that likely continues as you read this—immediate implementation of our recommendations would greatly improve this hideous state of affairs.

We urge you to act with all due speed. Should you wish to meet to discuss this matter in greater detail, please let us know as soon as possible. I can be reached at 757-622-7382, extension 8342.

Sincerely,



Bruce Friedrich
Director of Vegan Campaigns