



United States Department of Agriculture

Food Safety and
Inspection Service

July 5, 2023

Office of Field
Operations
Denver District Office

SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

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Center, Bldg. 45
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Denver, CO 80225

Deborah Fitch, Owner
Fitch Ranch Artisan Meat Company
Establishment M/V46419
383 East 1st Street
Craig, CO 81625
@fitchranch.com

Voice (303) 236-9800
Fax (303) 236-9794

LETTER OF CONCERN (LOC)

Dear Ms. Fitch,

This letter serves to alert you of the Food Safety Inspection Service's (FSIS) growing concern of what appears to be the inability or unwillingness to assure FSIS that Fitch Ranch Artisan Meat Company, Establishment M/V46419, located in Craig, Colorado, can humanely slaughter live animals.

Background Authority

The *Federal Meat Inspection Act* (FMIA), 21 USC Section 603(b), provides for the purpose of preventing the inhumane slaughtering of livestock. The FMIA gives FSIS the authority, as designated by the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, to prescribe rules and regulations describing examinations and inspections of the method by which cattle, sheep, swine, goats, horses, mules, and other equines are slaughtered in the establishments inspected under the FMIA. The FMIA also provides FSIS Program personnel the authority to suspend operations at a slaughtering establishment if FSIS finds that any cattle, sheep, swine, goats, horses, mules or other equines have been slaughtered or handled in connection with slaughter at such establishments by any method not in accordance with the *Humane Methods of Slaughter Act* (HMSA) of August 27, 1958 (72 Statute 862; Title 7 USC, Sections 1901-1906), until the establishment furnishes FSIS with satisfactory assurances that all slaughtering and handling in connection with the slaughter of livestock shall be in accordance with such methods.

Under the authorities of these Acts, FSIS has prescribed rules and regulations required for the humane slaughtering of livestock, contained in Title 9 CFR Part 313 and voluntary species, contained in Title 9 CFR Part 352. FSIS has also developed Rules of Practice regarding enforcement prescribed in 9 CFR Part 500. The Rules of Practice describe the types of enforcement actions that FSIS may take and include procedures for taking a withholding action and or suspension, with or without prior notification, as

well as the procedures for filing a complaint to withdraw a Grant of Federal Inspection.

Finding/Basis for Action

Over the past four months, the following Noncompliance Records (NRs) and a Memorandum of Interview (MOI) have been documented with an average of only 11 slaughter days (ranging from 2 to 35 slaughter days) between noncompliances:

- 3/1/2023 – NR issued due to an ineffective stun of a steer with a firearm (12-gauge shotgun) (2 stuns).
- 6/14/2023 – NR issued due to an ineffective stun of a market swine with an electrical current device (2 stuns).
- 6/20/2023 – NR issued due to an ineffective stun of a steer with a firearm (12-gauge shotgun) (2 stuns).
- 6/21/2023 – MOI issued due to ineffective stun of a custom exempt lamb with a hand-held captive bolt (HHCB) device (2 stuns).
- 6/26/2023 – NR issued due to an ineffective stun of a steer with a HHCB device (2 stuns).
- 6/28/2023 – NR issued due to an ineffective stun of a sow with an electrical current device (2 stuns).

At this time, FSIS does not consider your establishment to be operating under a Robust Systematic Approach (RSA) to Livestock Humane Handling.

Summary

This trend of ineffective stuns raises concern that your establishment may be at a higher risk of an egregious humane handling event as defined in FSIS Directive 6900.2 Revision 3. FSIS encourages you to carefully assess the root causes of these previous ineffective stun events, your humane handling practices and procedures, and your equipment and facilities to effectively identify and resolve any vulnerabilities that may have contributed to these ineffective stuns.

Please be advised, as a federally inspected establishment, you are required to comply with the regulations in 9 CFR Part 313 and all other requirements concerning the preparation, sale, and transportation of meat products. Failure to comply with these requirements could lead to the withholding or suspension of inspection or other enforcement type action.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, you may contact the Denver District Office at (303)236-9800.

Sincerely,

JESSICA

VANHOOK

Dr. Robert Reeder

Digitally signed by
JESSICA VANHOOK

Date: 2023.07.05
14:16:12 -06'00'

for

District Manager
USDA FSIS OFO
Denver District Office
Robert.Reeder@usda.gov

cc: D. James, DDM
J. Monteverde, DDM
J. VanHook, DDM
(b)(6) FLS
(b)(6), SPHV
(b)(6) CSI
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