

Slaughter Plants Re-Examined Using Animal Welfare Strategies

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — Meat-loaf and mashed potatoes are a weekly tradition in many homes, served with love by mothers across America. But Mom isn't the only one these days who is putting an extra helping of TLC into the meal.

Thanks to the efforts of a livestock welfare guru named Temple Grandin, beef slaughter plants are taking a renewed look at their operations, this time through the cow's perspective. "Animal handling in slaughter plants has seen a light year of

improvement in recent years," said Dr. Grandin, who received her PhD degree in animal science from the University of Illinois. "The meat industry is improving the way it treats cattle."

Dr. Grandin is an assistant professor of animal science at

Colorado State University, widely recognized and well-respected for improving animal handling facilities and practices and increasing cattle performance nationwide. She will talk in detail about the treatment of cattle during slaughter at the American Veterinary Medical Association's Animal Welfare Forum, Nov. 10, 2000, in Itasca, Illinois.

"Slaughter plants are operated very differently than they were in the '70s," she said. "The industry is turning around thanks to a growing concern for animals. It's been quite a dramatic improvement."

And that improvement is, in no small part, due to Dr. Grandin. By using a "cow's-eye-view" to relate to the fear experienced by animals in packing plants, she has revolutionized the industry. Dr. Grandin has developed entry chute and conveyor systems that calm animals and allow humane slaughter. Her equipment designs are based on research findings such as including solid sides and roofs overhead to block a cow's wide-angle, 300-degree field of vision. More than half of the cattle dispatched in North America now move through equipment she designed.

As an independent consultant, Dr. Grandin reviews slaughter plant operations. In the first six months of 1999, she found that 17 of 22 plants she audited, or 77 percent, rendered more than 95 percent of cattle unconscious with a single shot from a captive bolt runner. The method destroys the brain instantaneously. However, some clinically dead cattle may involuntarily kick after stunning, according to Dr. Grandin, and appear to be in pain. Brain-wave research performed in New Zealand, Holland, and

England has verified the procedure as painless. By the end of 1999, 37 of 41 plants reviewed, or 90 percent were using the stunning procedure correctly.

Her audits also revealed that 86 percent of plants achieved cattle vocalization scores of less than 3 percent. Cattle indicate stress by mooing and bellowing, so a quiet plant is a low-stress plant.

Temple Grandin is in huge demand, both nationally and overseas, because the good word is out. When she's on hand, nothing gets overlooked. "Cattle are afraid of the dark. They don't like rapid movement, noises, or shadows," Dr. Grandin said. "One plant had a problem with cattle balking and refusing to go up the chute. I toured the facility and found a small metal chain jiggling in the distance. After the chain was removed, the problem was solved."

Dr. Grandin's problem-solving methods involve a critical, top-to-bottom analysis — in the most literal sense. She studies every inch of the plant, from floor to ceiling, to determine how a cow will perceive the environment.

"Most adverse things found in slaughter plants are fairly easy to fix. Stunning equipment needs to be maintained; lighting may need to be adjusted," Dr. Grandin said. "It's a matter of plant managers getting rid of all the distractions."

Regulations and guidelines for humane slaughter are explained in the Humane Slaughter Act, which is enforced by the USDA. Dr. Grandin was instrumental in the act's development and also created objective criteria for humane treatment in slaughter plants, which are embraced throughout the cattle industry.

Tobacco Auction Needs Location

ANDY ANDREWS
Lancaster Farming Staff
LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — The Pennsylvania Tobacco Marketing Association plans another auction season.

Problem is, the auction doesn't have a location, and the association is putting out a request.

According to Dennis Hess, auction manager, "If anybody had an idea on a building that we could rent, we would probably like to have at least 10,000 square feet with a ground-level door and a couple of dock doors."

Almost any location in the county would be OK for the association.

Hess said, "The tobacco season this year seems to be showing a fair amount of interest at this time. I have a feeling that the market will be better this year than last."

Hess noted there is considerably less tobacco in the area, about half of what was here last year.

The auction operated late last year and into this year in a warehouse at the Orlon Industrial Park in New Holland. There, growers received bids of about 60-65 cents per pound, on average, according to Hess, for mostly Maryland 609 and some Pa. Type 41 tobaccos.

The association conducted a sale in mid-December and several sales into the early part of this year in a leased 20,000 square foot building.

Hess noted, despite depressed prices from last year, already this year there has been some interest by buyers. A little bit has been negotiated under contract at \$1 a pound.

Hess said he knew of one fel-

low who received \$1.10 a pound, "which already sounds better than last year," he said.

"Buyers are anxious to get started this year," noted Hess.


Growers should consider the following if they intend to market the tobacco at the auction:

- Grade the tobacco properly. Be careful about moisture levels — keep them down.

- Keep bales light. The ideal weight for tobacco bales is between 50-60 pounds. If they are packed together and become too heavy, the tobacco can become damaged, especially if wet.

The association has eyed January as the possible start of the auction, or perhaps before, if a building becomes available.

Hess noted that if anybody knows of available space for the auction, call him at the cooperative, (717) 626-6970.




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