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To:

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Regarding: Chicken investigation 2009

I have been working with animals for 18 years and have been a licensed veterinarian for 3 years. As part of my training I have studied poultry farming and zoonotic disease. Also as a general practitioner part of my everyday job is to evaluate animals for pain and stress in many situations.

The practices shown in this video should bring shame upon those directly or indirectly involved. When one is at the grocery store, the thought is that in modern day society that even those we eat are given dignity and respect in their handling and slaughter. It is expected by most consumers that minimal suffering, low prevalence of disease and humane housing conditions are provided by the manufacturer. While utopia in production farming is as of today unachievable, standards of care have to be set and followed to minimize the stress and suffering of the animals we farm. To allow these conditions to persist, not only is a violation of the society we have constructed, but a health risk to those being supplied.

First off, the euthanasia of the chickens in the video loosely falls under the category of cervical dislocation. The definition of cervical dislocation is listed below:

Cervical Dislocation

Where dislocation of the neck is used as the humane method of slaughter, it shall be subject to the following requirements.

(a) Dislocation of the neck by separating the cervical vertebrae from the base of the skull shall be performed quickly to induce rapid unconsciousness with a minimum of excitement and discomfort to the poultry.

(b) Bleeding shall immediately follow cervical dislocation.

AUTHORITY: Note: Authority cited: Section 19501.5, Food and Agricultural Code. Reference: Sections 19501 and 19501.5, Food and Agricultural Code.

Cervical dislocation is currently seen as an acceptable form of humane euthanasia by the American Veterinary Medical Association if proper training and technique is used. This level of compliance is needed to ensure a low level of suffering of the animal.

"Those responsible for the use of this technique must ensure that personnel performing cervical dislocation techniques have been properly trained and consistently apply it humanely and effectively." (American Veterinary Medical Association guidelines on euthanasia)

These guidelines were set in place to minimize the suffering and stress placed on the animal and requires that properly trained personnel are used to administer this technique. The video shows a violation of this standard and the unnecessary suffering of the animal involved. Many of the chickens were blatantly euthanized poorly, and were conscious and suffering due to improper technique. Where failures are always expected when dealing with the mass euthanasia of poultry, the numbers suggested by the video warrant further investigation of how euthanasia is practiced at this facility. The technique of holding the chicken by the head and spinning it, to my knowledge is not a humane way to perform cervical dislocation, and therefore not an acceptable practice. More humane and less technically complicated methods to euthanize poultry as readily available such as portable controlled atmosphere killing units and it should be said that if proper techniques and training cannot be provided for the workers, that this method should be employed. As shown in the video, the staff competency and technique used by this farm is minimally effective in its success.

Another point that deserves further investigation is the housing used in this facility. It is well documented that many of the battery cages used by this facility were in bad repair. The gaps in the wire have lead to a decrease in overall health of a number of the animals being housed. Wounds, granulomas, fractures and unsanitary conditions are shown in the video that can and should be avoided by proper upkeep of the facility. The disrepair of the factory is leading to unnecessary stress, suffering and an increase in disease at the farm. It can also be argued that fewer birds should be housed per cage. Break down of the wire cages and overcrowding can give way to unnecessary suffering of the animals housed as well as stress and increased disease. The main public health issue in poultry is salmonellosis. This is a bacterium that can be passed from an infected chicken into the eggs, and can be passed more readily from bird to bird by unsanitary conditions. Stress and injury greatly increases the number of animals that become infected by these potentially zoonotic bacteria. To me, poor equipment conditions also indicate an improperly managed farm and a greater public health risk to the consumer.

Overall, this video highlights too many inadequacies in handling, housing and sanitation to ignore. The chickens shown were often shown to be in poor health and in some cases suffering unduly. The lack of proper facilities at this farm has undoubtedly lead to unneeded stress and an increased risk of disease in these animals. I feel that an evaluation of practice and facilities is warranted in order to protect the animals involved, as well as to decrease the risk of a public health to the public.

