

The Center *for* Food Integrity

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Expert Panel Addresses Hidden Camera Investigation at Oklahoma Hog Farm

KANSAS CITY, MO. (Nov. 21, 2013) – A panel of farm animal care specialists created to analyze undercover video investigations at livestock farms has examined recently released video from a hog farm in Oklahoma. The Center for Food Integrity (CFI) created the Animal Care Review Panel to engage recognized animal care specialists to examine video and provide expert perspectives for food retailers, the pork industry and the media.

The panel examined video that was posted online by the group Mercy for Animals. The video was also used in an NBC News online report. The panel was comprised of Dr. Candace Croney, Purdue University; Dr. Temple Grandin, Colorado State University and Dr. John Deen, University of Minnesota.

“The behavior of the employees is abusive to animals,” said Grandin. “Kicking and beating animals is never acceptable.”

“There’s abuse and egregious misbehavior by employees in their handling of the animals in this video,” said Deen. “What is especially concerning is that it appears to be a culture rather than being able to attribute the behavior to individuals. But this video also shows common and acceptable production practices that are not pleasant to see but there are valid reasons for using them on the farm.”

Animal Handling

The video shows pigs being thrown, kicked, and picked up by their ears. Workers are seen using fingers to gouge pigs’ eyes and in one instance, an employee is shown vigorously shaking a small pig.

“These behaviors violate every principle of humane animal handling and go against everything the swine industry advocates for providing decent quality care for animals,” said Croney. “They are deeply disturbing. No pig farmer who is a responsible steward of animals can support the abusive handling of animals that is seen in this video.”

“Training is readily available on how these animals should be treated,” said Deen. “This is a short video and we’re not sure what else is going on, but what is seen is indicative of behaviors that probably reflect the overall level of care on this particular farm.”

“They probably were not trained,” said Grandin. “If they were trained, it was very poor training.”

In one scene, a worker is seen kicking and shoving an animal in an apparently effort to get it to stand up.

“I don’t think the animal could get up,” said Grandin. “They were beating an animal that was down? It’s apparent they were not very well trained.”



In more than one instance, workers are seen using a panel of wood known as a “sorting board” to strike animals.

“Sorting boards are to be used to help guide an animal in the direction you would like them to move,” said Croney. “They are not to be used to strike an animal under any circumstance.”

“The sows seen in this video are consistently having difficulty doing what the caretaker is attempting to get them to do. If animals are not cooperating, it is not because they are stupid or spiteful or stubborn. It is because they are afraid, in pain, or don’t understand what they’re being asked to do. The workers seen in this video seem to have no understanding of this.”

“Poking pigs in the eye multiple times, violently shaking a young piglet, beating a sow with the edge of a board – these are things I rate as cruelty to animals,” said Grandin.

Procedures

One expert noted that while they are unpleasant to watch, procedures such as tail docking, castration, and euthanasia, are necessary functions on a pig farm. It was also noted that it is imperative such procedures be carried out within standards established by veterinary groups and the swine industry.

“I didn’t see anything wrong with the way the piglet was being castrated,” said Grandin. “It looked like normal procedure to me.”

“There was an instance of somebody using a floor scraper to dock the tail of a pig, which is unacceptable,” said Deen. “The animal also appeared to be larger than what is an acceptable age at which to perform this procedure.”

In the video, workers are seen using a method known as “blunt force trauma” to euthanize pigs. It involves striking a pig’s head against a concrete floor. The video infers the practice is not being carried out properly as pigs are shown afterward convulsing or moving their legs in a paddling motion.

“In my experience, paddling is involuntary movement and can occur after successful euthanasia,” said Deen. “Much of what is seen appears to be post-mortem thrashing which might lead some to think the animals are still alive.”

“Those appeared to be unconscious convulsions, but the AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) recommends those using manually applied blunt force to the head as a euthanasia method to actively search for alternative approaches,” said Grandin. “And, I agree with them.”

In one scene, an animal is shown on a pile of dead pigs and appears to still be breathing.

“The piglet appears to be gasping,” said Deen. “There was no outward sign that this pig had been euthanized. This concerns me. There are times when euthanasia is the most humane thing to do and it should be carried out in a timely manner to avoid pain and suffering.”

“Given the poor attitudes and improper handling seen in the video, it is reasonable to question how well other procedures such as castration and blunt force trauma are performed, especially in light of video of at least one pig that either was improperly euthanized or was not euthanized despite a need to do so,” added Croney.



Facilities and Conditions

The video showed several scenes of sows being housed in gestation stalls.

“The stalls shown in the video are homemade and do not have a front exit,” said Deen. “This means the sows must back out of the stalls. It would be better if the sows could move forward.”

It was felt the barn conditions in the video appeared to be relatively bright and clean. But in one scene, a person is seen lifting a shovel containing a pile of maggots.

“This implies that the facility was unsanitary,” said Croney. “But the video doesn’t show where they came from which would have been helpful.”

The experts agreed that flies are commonly present where livestock is raised and while measures should be taken to minimize their presence, where there are flies there will be maggots. The key is to keep them from proliferating in areas that would compromise a healthy growing environment.

Employee Attitude and Knowledge

“These workers are either completely lacking in knowledge about proper animal handling, in which case they shouldn’t be handling animals, or they are aware and simply choose not to follow appropriate training protocols and quality assurance standards relative to animal handling,” said Croney. “It’s also obvious that they are not properly supervised. If these behaviors are tolerated and workers feel like what they are doing is appropriate – that’s just wrong.

“There is willful abuse seen in this video. These workers show absolutely no respect or compassion for animals,” added Croney. “They also illustrate a lack of respect for the industry in which they work and for the consumers who purchase products that come from these animals. There’s no excuse for that. It is unprofessional and unethical.”

Conclusions

“The poor and unacceptable ways in which these animals were handled appears to be a common problem in these videos and is clearly an issue the industry needs to tackle,” said Croney. “The swine industry has invested a lot in putting together programs and training to ensure things like this don’t happen. We all need to demonstrate collective responsibility, think about why these problems continue to happen and come up with a way to prevent them from occurring.”

“I know from my dealings that many farmers who raise pigs feel incidents like this are an affront to their efforts to do things the right way,” said Deen. “The people seen in this video need to feel an accountability not only to their employers but to each other. That’s the part that concerns me the most. I understand that a bad apple can slip through but how does a community within a barn react to that? What can we do when the behavior inside the barn seems to be systemic? We need to create atmospheres of accountability.”

Hidden camera investigations at livestock farms have heightened public attention on animal care issues. In an effort to foster a more balanced conversation and to provide credible feedback to promote continuous improvement in farm animal care, CFI created the Animal Care Review Panel.



The Panel operates independently. Its reviews, assessments, recommendations and reports will not be submitted to the pork industry for review or approval. CFI's only role is to facilitate the review process and release the panel's findings.

About the Experts

Dr. Candace Croney Purdue University

Dr. Candace Croney is a renowned expert in applied animal behavior, with an emphasis on animal learning, welfare and ethics. She is an associate professor of animal sciences at Purdue University. She has contributed to nationwide animal welfare efforts working with organizations such as the American Zoo and Aquarium Association and many others. She is on the Scientific Advisory Committee of the American Humane Certified program, and her research on farm animal cognition has been featured in national and international broadcast programs.

Dr. Temple Grandin Colorado State University

Dr. Temple Grandin is one of the most noted experts in animal behavior and animal welfare. She is a bestselling author and consultant to the livestock industry. Dr. Grandin is a professor of animal science at Colorado State University and also designs livestock handling facilities. She has authored over 400 articles in both scientific journals and livestock periodicals on animal handling, welfare, and facility design.

Dr. John Deen University of Minnesota

Dr. John Deen is a professor in veterinary epidemiology at the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Minnesota. His work in research, teaching and extension has been in welfare, epidemiology and economics, focusing on measurement and optimization across competing needs in pig farming. He provides training to farmers, veterinarians, and veterinary students. Dr. Deen is also project lead with USAID in reducing the threats of spread of disease from animals to humans, particularly in central Africa and Southeast Asia. He earned his DVM and PhD from the University of Guelph and gained board certification in swine health management from the American College of Veterinary Practitioners in 1994.

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