



THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR
FOOD INTEGRITY

Animal Care Review Panel Report

**EXPERT PANEL ADDRESSES HIDDEN CAMERA INVESTIGATION
AT CANADIAN EGG FARM**

June 2018

Expert Panel Addresses Hidden Camera Investigation at Canadian Egg Farm

June 25, 2018

A panel of farm animal care specialists has examined undercover video reportedly obtained from an egg farm in British Columbia. The Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI) established the Animal Care Review Panel to engage recognized animal care specialists to examine hidden camera video investigations and provide expert perspectives for food retailers, the egg industry and the media.

The panel was asked to examine a 2.5-minute video apparently produced by the group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). The panel also viewed a brief promotional advertisement for CTV's news coverage of PETA's video.

The panel was comprised of Dr. Tom Inglis, a practicing poultry veterinarian and Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Calgary, in collaboration with Dr. Ben Schlegel, board-certified poultry veterinarian with Poultry Health Services; Jennifer Woods, Animal Welfare Specialist; and Dr. Mike Petrik, veterinarian, MSc animal welfare. The experts viewed the videos separately and reviewed each other's analysis prior to issuing this report.

Inglis/Schlegel analysis:

It is hard to assess the situations presented due to the highly edited video which shifts between very short segments from multiple facilities and bird types (brown, white, various ages).

The brown birds in the manure pit are clean on top and stuck in wet manure as if they have been placed there. On occasion, birds gain access to a manure pit in barns that have deep pits and must be removed. It is very unusual for a bird that gets in a manure pit to not be dirty on their back feathers and head.

In a real barn situation, these birds are usually quite dirty not just on the underside so that footage looks suspiciously staged. If the situations "observed" are actually taking place, they should be reported for a follow up investigation by SPCA or relevant authority, not videotaped and reported months to years later. We feel this is irresponsible.

None of the images are good or of normal birds or of normal production and they are disturbing and show conditions that must be addressed as soon as they are identified (prolapsed cloaca, removal of dead birds). The footage is cobbled together in a way that leads the viewer to assume it is the way layer barns are run rather than a compilation of diseases and conditions which can occur. The context that is required to make an assessment would be how long any of these birds were in these states of distress before being helped by the farmer.

It would be important to know if the video footage is being captured by a PETA employee who has also been hired by the farmer. In previous cases where the "undercover" employee is trying to capture specific images rather than caring for the birds they have been hired by the farmer to help take care of.

The only way to assess the quality of bird care and how a farm is being run is to inspect the facility, we can't make an assessment of the operations from this other than to say this video is not what we see on a daily basis working on farms. This video clip clearly edits together disturbing footage from different barns at different times to give the impression of one disastrous facility and is meant to represent the industry in a way that would lead the viewer to be concerned and to consider as the last statement in the video suggests "not eating eggs".

There has been no credible action related to this activity: reporting the facility, follow up investigation by relevant authorities and it lacks continuity, context and is clearly designed for a message rather than understanding and the education of consumers. Our hope would be that if this video clip is shown as "news" that it is followed up with sufficient confirmation of validity and an attempt to confirm that the facility and situations depicted actually occurred, were not staged and were responsibly reported to ensure that birds did not suffer or continue to suffer.

Woods analysis:

Housing - This video appears to have been taken in an older style layer barn that is not reflective of the barns I have been in of late, nor are common in Canadian production. I was unable to confirm from the video the date or location of this video footage. The narrator states only that the birds are raised in “warehouses like these” in BC so this very well may not be current or actual footage from a BC egg farm.

Bird Health - Some of the hens appear to be at “end of lay” and some feather loss is not uncommon at this stage. Many of the birds in the barns do reflect a more extreme molt than normally seen, but more information on the birds would be needed.

I cannot confirm that the bird noted in the video is actually suffering from a prolapsed cloaca. It appears it may actually be preparing to lay an egg? A prolapse would have to be diagnosed when the bird was not actively flexing in that area.

There does appear to be dead birds in some of the cages and possibly in the manure pit, both fresher looking mortalities and older mortalities that have experienced decomposition.

Waste Management - Poultry barns do have manure disposal areas underneath the barns to allow for the proper management of manure and urine. The barns are ventilated to prevent the buildup of ammonia in the birds' living space. This appears to be an older style manure pit, not one you would commonly see in current day facilities. Housing is designed so the waste goes directly into the manure storage areas and does not go on top of other birds.

As for the footage from within the manure area, these birds are a completely different type of bird than the birds shown in the barn. They are brown birds whereas the hens in the barn footage are white birds.

The narrator states that there were over 200 birds trapped in the manure and dozens rescued, yet the video does not support this claim. There appears to be only a few “trapped” birds shown in this video.

What I found extremely odd is the only wet, mushy areas appears to be where the birds are “trapped” yet everything else around it is dry. Manure pits are normally not soupy or boggy like shown in video. There are also no birds walking around in this area, which is what you would normally see if birds had fallen down there. If there were 200 birds, you would see them walking around. Throughout the video all areas of the manure pit are quite solid except where the “trapped” birds are?

Petrik analysis:

The video shows what is known as a high-rise poultry operation, which is designed to allow manure to drop through cages and into a storage pit below the birds in order to keep the birds away from their manure and increase health. The manure pit doubles as a storage space so that manure can be used in an ecologically responsible way and put on the fields as a natural fertilizer in the spring. It is normal for manure to accumulate in this space, and the ventilation in the barn is designed so that ammonia and other gases are expelled and do not reach the birds.

What's seen in this video is older technology, and is uncommon in the Canadian poultry industry currently. The video reported that there were hundreds of birds trapped in the manure pit, however under closer inspection it appears that the same two birds were filmed several times from different angles, which makes me question how many birds actually were trapped. Regardless of the number, however, the pits should be examined every day, and no birds should be exposed to these conditions.

Another interesting point is that only brown birds were observed in distress in the manure pit, but only white birds were shown in the cages. These birds were not from the same barn, as brown birds and white birds are not housed together due to differences in nutritional needs.

The presence of birds in the manure pits, and the presence of long dead birds in the cages are both unacceptable to laying hen farmers, and should not be present on Canadian laying hen farms. The bird that was shown with the purported prolapsed cloaca appeared to be laying an egg. It is normal for the cloaca to extend during egg-laying, and is a problem only if it doesn't revert back to normal afterwards. It is impossible to tell if that bird's cloaca was abnormal or not, because there was an egg being laid at the time.

Conclusions:

Inglis/Schlegel conclusions:

Standard practice in the egg industry is that prolapsed, injured and sick birds should be removed from their cage for observation and closely monitoring or humanely euthanized upon detection. Dead and sick birds should be removed from cages promptly. The image of a decomposed bird in the cage is unacceptable and that facility should be inspected once identified.

Birds that fall into a manure pit or escape their cages or pen should be rapidly caught and put back in their home cage a segregation to be cleaned and recover or put in a hospital pen/cage or euthanized according to their condition.

Deep manure pit barns are an older style of barn, they still exist and can be managed to maintain good to excellent barn conditions for birds. In response to consumer concerns, the Canadian egg industry is in the process of transitioning housing systems away from conventional housing (<http://www.eggfarmers.ca/press/egg-farmers-of-canada-announces-industry-wide-transition-away-from-conventional-housing/>). These new housing systems will provide more space for individual laying hens and it should be noted when evaluating cage systems that birds have been housed in cages since antiquity and most pets and precious birds still are.

Conventional cages do not necessarily cause inflammation in the feet of laying hens. "Hens in conventional cages and furnished cages have less footpad dermatitis and bumblefoot than more extensively housed hens" (Lay et al, Poultry Science, 2011)*.

*Lay, D. C., Fulton, R. M., Hester, P. Y., Karcher, D. M., Kjaer, J. B., Mench, J. A., ... & Porter, R. E. (2011). Hen welfare in different housing systems. Poultry Science, 90(1), 278-294.

Woods conclusions:

This video footage, especially of the barn, does not appear to be reflective of current day laying barns nor to the current standards of the Codes. If this video footage is actually footage taken this spring, then the barns, housing and manure disposal area should be updated to meet the Canadian Codes of Practice for Laying Hens and managed as per Codes.

It is not acceptable to leave mortalities in housing with other birds. All barns should be checked daily and mortalities removed from housing when found.

There is a chance that a bird may happen to be "in the way" when another bird defecates within their own cage, but housing is designed in a way that would prevent birds from being in the direct path of the birds above them.

Though a rare occurrence, when birds do end up in the manure storage and disposal area they should be immediately retrieved. Manure disposal areas should be checked regularly to insure there are not birds in that have gotten in that area. Leaving birds down there is unacceptable.

I struggle with the video of the trapped birds because manure pits under bird houses like that should not have wet, boggy random spots that would be so deep and boggy birds would get stuck in them. The manure all around the trapped birds is not reflective of what is normal nor expected. It just seemed really off, as did how clean and healthy some of the birds were for falling into a manure pit and being there long enough to sink and get trapped. There also was no footage of any bird walking around, just the couple trapped right next to each other, which you would expect if there were 200 birds loose down there. Something just seems very off.

There may be more footage that addresses some of my questions and concerns about the video, but I was only able to comment on the short footage I was provided.

In conclusion, all egg farmers in Canada are expected to follow the standards set forth in the Canadian Codes of Practice for Laying Hens. If producers are found to not be adhering to the standards I would expect industry to intervene and work on correctional actions along with providing further education to the producer.

Petrik conclusions:

The birds that were loose in the manure pit and the dead birds in the cages are unacceptable practices to the Canadian laying hen industry, and the farmer was not showing an appropriate amount of care in allowing that to happen. This high-rise type of housing system for laying hens is old technology, and has mostly been replaced by more modern housing systems in Canada. However, even old technology barns can provide good animal welfare if more attentively managed.

Laying hen farmers in Canada have recognized that conventional cages do not provide the housing environments that we aspire to provide for our birds. Because of this, the Code of Practice for laying hens has been developed through the National Farm Animal Care Council, and the laying hen industry has required that these types of conventional cages be phased out of the industry, and replaced with housing that provides more space, perching, nest spaces, and scratch areas for all chickens used for egg laying in Canada. These new requirements represent a very large investment by egg farmers in Canada, and demonstrate a true commitment to laying hen welfare across Canada.

Hidden camera investigations in recent years 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, CCFI established the Animal Care Review Panel.

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

About the Experts

Dr. Tom Inglis

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Calgary

Born in Saskatoon and raised in Vermilion and Edmonton where he attended the University of Alberta, Dr. Inglis completed a BSc. in Agriculture in 1999. He is a graduate from the WCVN in Saskatoon where he received his DVM in 2003 and became a board-certified poultry veterinarian with the American College of Poultry Veterinarians in 2009. Dr. Inglis developed a fascination with poultry production and nutrition as a student at the University of Alberta, where he continues to participate in the research program and is the flock health veterinarian for the Poultry Research Centre. As an adjunct assistant professor on faculty at the University of Calgary's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, he teaches poultry medicine and diseases. Tom's areas of focus in practice and research are broiler and turkey production, integrated health programs, processing (stunning, food safety and humane handling), effective disinfection and biosecurity.

Dr. Ben Schlegel, DVM

Having grown up on a broiler and swine farm near Tavistock, ON, Dr. Schlegel attended the University of Waterloo for his BSc degree and the University of Guelph for his DVM degree. During his university career he was involved with many research projects including projects developing autogenous vaccines for food animals, projects investigating antimicrobial resistance in animals and food and in food animal veterinary microbiology. After graduation Ben began working for Poultry Health Services Ltd. in Airdrie Alberta, a commercial poultry industry consulting veterinary practice, and was involved in diagnostics for sick flocks and research projects on poultry welfare. Dr. Schlegel was recognized for this work by being awarded the Alberta Farm Animal Care Award of Distinction for Innovation, awarded for research on poultry euthanasia in 2015. He has published poultry case reports in veterinary journals and spoken at poultry veterinary conferences on animal welfare and on disease studies. Dr. Schlegel completed a distance Master of Avian Health and Medicine degree in 2017 which was jointly awarded by the University of Georgia and the University of Melbourne. He became a diplomate of the American College of Poultry Veterinarians in 2017 and opened a new branch of Poultry Health Services Inc. in Stratford, ON providing consulting veterinary services to the poultry industry in Ontario.

Jennifer Woods, MSc.

Veterinary Preventative Med., Livestock Handling and Care Specialist

Woods obtained her undergrad degree in Animal Science at Colorado State University and her Masters in Veterinary Preventative Medicine - Animal Welfare from Iowa State University.

Certifications include:

- Professional Animal Auditor Certification Organization (PAACO) – Certified auditor for Poultry, Red Meat, Common Swine Audit and Beef Feedlot. Also an instructor for PAACO.
- Canadian Livestock Transport Certification – lead trainer
- Livestock Emergency Response – Course developer and instructor

With over 25 years experience with the livestock and poultry industries in all aspects of animal welfare and care since 1998, her areas of expertise include euthanasia, animal handling and behavior, animal welfare auditing and assessing (slaughter, farm, feedlot and transportation), livestock emergency response, transportation and facility design. Jennifer's work has taken her all over the globe to audit, train and improve farm animal welfare.

Mike Petrik, DVM, MSc. Animal Welfare

Dr. Petrik has specialized as an egg-laying hen veterinarian since 2000. He graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College in 1998. In 2014, he received his Master of Science in Animal Welfare from the University of Guelph. Dr. Petrik has worked on both the scientific and implementation committees for the Canadian laying hens Codes of Practice, as well as other provincial and national animal welfare programs. He has an appreciation for the day-to-day care of birds, having grown up on a poultry farm with laying hens and broiler chickens. His natural ability to explain technical details and controversial issues in an engaging and credible way has gained him a loyal following among people interested in poultry issues.