



THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR  
**FOOD INTEGRITY**

# **Animal Care Review Panel Report**

**EXPERTS REVIEW UNDERCOVER VIDEO AT A  
TURKEY PROCESSING PLANT**

**October 2016**

## Expert Panel Examines Hidden Camera Turkey Plant Video

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A panel of farm animal care experts has examined undercover video from a British Columbia turkey plant. The Centre for Food Integrity (CFI) created the Animal Care Review Panel program to engage recognized animal care specialists to examine hidden camera video investigations and provide expert perspectives for food retailers, the poultry industry and the media.

Animal care experts were asked to examine video contained in a report on the television news magazine W5 featuring video obtained by an undercover operative working for an animal advocacy group. The experts reviewed approximately 30 minutes of unedited video posted on the W5 website. The panelists reviewed the video independently. Their observations have been combined in this report. The panel members reviewed each other's comments before this report was finalized.

The panel was comprised of Dr. Ruth Newberry, professor of ethology, Norwegian University of Life Sciences; Dr. Mike Petrik, a poultry veterinarian; and Jennifer Woods, an animal care and welfare specialist.

### The Process

#### Dr. Newberry explains the processes shows in the video:

I see turkeys on a transport vehicle, spread among different compartments. Some scenes depict big, clean turkeys that appear to be in very good condition.

There are scenes of a compartment containing a few birds that appear wet and dirty. It appears that these turkeys may have been set aside for inspection and possible euthanasia as at least one is lame.

There are scenes of turkeys being removed from the truck compartments and hung on shackles. The turkeys are seen hanging on shackles while moving towards a shallow water trough. Here, the turkey's head is made wet and the turkey is immediately stunned unconscious with an electric shock. The wetting of the head is done to improve electrical conductivity, thereby ensuring a correct amount of electrical current needed to stun the bird. The bird's head then hangs loosely without movement.

After being rendered unconscious, the bird's neck passes across a sharp knife that cuts both carotid arteries, allowing blood to drain from the body. The rapid blood loss results in death of the bird while unconscious. Occasionally, a bird's neck is not properly cut. A person is correctly located after the automatic knife. This person's job is to manually cut both carotid arteries of any bird that has not been properly stunned or had both carotid arteries fully severed.

After the blood has been drained from the bird, by which time it is certainly dead, it passes into a scalding tank that contains hot water and causes the feathers to be loosened. The carcass then passes through a plucker that removes the feathers.

There is a scene showing a plucked carcass on the floor that appears pink. It is hard to tell the color from a video taken in artificial lighting, without being able to observe the bird directly. However, if the carcass is red, it would be a sign that the bird did not properly bleed out before entering the scalding tank which can occur if the bird misses both the automatic and manual knife cut, implying the potential to regain consciousness. This would clearly be a serious welfare concern, which is why the person positioned to ensure that birds bleed out properly has a very important job.

**Dr. Petrik:**

The video shows the early part of the turkey slaughter process. The early images are of a truck in “lairage”, which is where the birds wait to be unloaded for processing. Birds are removed from the compartments in the truck, and hung on shackles, which carry them through the slaughter process.

The birds come into contact with an electrified plate, which renders them unconscious, and go through a water bath to ensure they are deeply insensible and stay that way until they are killed. The birds then go over the automatic cutting blade to sever the large vessels in the neck so that the bird will bleed out. This is important for meat quality, and also ensures the bird will never regain consciousness.

Once insensible, the birds enter the scalding tank to make it possible to remove the feathers.

**Ms. Woods:**

Upon arrival at the plant, the birds are held in a holding area until their time to unload. They are then moved into the plant, removed from their coops (compartments the birds are transported in) and hung by hand on leg shackles. The birds will then proceed down the shackle line, to an electrical water bath where they are stunned, rendering them unconscious. Following stunning, they are immediately passed through a cutter, which is a spinning knife that places a cut across their throat allowing for a quick release of blood and a timely death without returning to consciousness. The dead birds are then passed through a scalding tank (tank of very hot water) to remove the feathers.

## Animal Handling, Employee Knowledge and Attitude

**Dr. Newberry:**

The distance between the truck and the line of shackles is short, resulting in minimal handling being required. In general, the turkeys are being properly handled and hung with two legs.

Occasionally, a turkey is shown being removed by one leg before catching hold of the second leg whereas it would be preferable to ensure that both legs are being held securely before removing the bird from the truck.

A turkey that has been run over by a truck is depicted. If the turkey had been dropped during handling or fallen from the truck and was alive when run over, this would imply that more attention is needed to avoid turkeys from getting loose, and greater vigilance is needed before moving vehicles.

One person is shown shoving the breast of a bird several times before removing it from the truck. It is unclear why this was done and it is not accepted practice.

The shackling and electrical stunning of turkeys has been standard practice for several decades, and it is considered acceptable practice according to the Canadian Humane Slaughter Act (administered by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency), as well as by the Canadian and American Veterinary Medical Associations. However, turkey plants are converting to the use of gas stunning to avoid the stress of handling and shackling turkeys prior to slaughter. The plant in question has announced plans to install automated gas stunning equipment.

A concern with the use of electrical stunning occurs when mechanical problems cause the line to stop unexpectedly during operation. If the stop is extended, it is necessary to remove live birds from the shackles and hold them in transport compartments in a well ventilated area until the line is once again functional. However, even a brief stoppage is likely to be stressful for turkeys already hanging on shackles.

It is evident that the employees are familiar with the requirement to handle turkeys by both legs when shackling them and that they are aware of the importance of ensuring that the turkeys are dead before entering the scalding tank. The truck driver shows awareness of the importance of taking care to avoid running over any loose turkey. In one case, it sounds as if an employee is indicating that unfit birds should be placed on the shackles, but it is not possible to see from the video if the birds under discussion are unfit or not.

It is clear that the employees seen in the video have had basic training. It should also not be expected that they would have the same level of knowledge as a veterinarian trained in the diagnosis of medical conditions. However, some remarks suggest a need for greater professionalism towards their job and perhaps a greater sense of opportunities to make improvements.

**Dr. Petrik:**

Birds are all hung properly, by both legs, and there is no sign of violent or careless behavior. There are instances where the turkeys flap their wings when being pulled out of the truck, but it does not appear the workers treat these birds aggressively. There is no evidence that the actions of the workers are harming or unduly stressing the birds.

A worker is seen striking a turkey on its side, presumably to stop the bird from flapping its wings. While not aggressive in my opinion, this should not be done.

The instruction heard from one employee that injured birds should be shackled is incorrect and this should be addressed through training. Injured birds should be euthanized and not hung on the line. By his comments, it appears to me the worker knows that seriously injured birds shouldn't be hung, but his description of how to handle injured birds was not specific enough, in my opinion. Workers in this so-called "live hang" area are not trained in diagnosing sick birds. The flocks are examined by a veterinarian to ensure they are healthy. It is beyond the workers' training to evaluate health, but they should alert a supervisor if they have concerns. Again, it would appear training should be more complete.

The worker who decapitated a turkey and tossed the head to a co-worker demonstrates a lack of respect for the birds. It is not a welfare issue, but should not be an accepted practice.

The automatic throat-cutting device seems to be adjusted properly, and the backup slitters were effective. I didn't view any birds being missed, and any questionable birds were handled well by the backup person.

The graphic description given by one employee of the effect on a bird if it enters the scalding tank while still conscious is meant, I think, to reinforce the importance of the backup killer doing his job effectively. The comments are not very accurate in many ways (especially when diagnosing abnormalities in the birds on the line, and the reason that birds would convulse on the line), but absolutely show his interest in the well-being of the birds he is working with.

From watching the video, I believe that the workers are well trained in the processes they are performing, but seem to have some gaps in their training around the understanding of why the process occurs the way it does. Understanding the whole process better would help workers understand their role in the process.

**Ms. Woods:**

During unloading, birds are expected to be unloaded in a low stress, humane manner. They should be removed by grasping both legs and sliding them out of coop on their breast. Birds should never be grabbed or lifted by the neck, head, tail or the wings. Generally speaking, handling observed during unloading in the video was acceptable. Birds were slid out of the coops on their breasts and carried by two legs to the shackle line.

An employee was shown "jabbing" a bird in the chest during removal from a coop. This is by no means acceptable nor is it a common industry practice. I recommend clearly enforcing zero tolerance for any deviance from standard handling practices including the "jabbing" of birds in the chest and removal of birds by one leg from coop.

For bird handling, all shackling observed on the video was acceptable and within industry standards. All birds were carried to the shackles by two legs and properly placed in the shackles.

I observed no aggressive handling by any of the employees. All birds were shackled by both legs, placed in individual shackles. One bird appeared to have blood on one leg as it was placed in shackle, but the video was not clear enough to identify the origin of the blood.

Any bird that is injured, sick, unfit or distressed should not be placed in shackles. The birds should be immediately euthanized and either shackled for further processing if fit for consumption, or disposed of after euthanized and confirmed dead.

One of the videos documents employees stating that all birds get shackled - "if alive, hang it". There appeared to be birds that were injured/ill/distressed placed in shackles. There was also a bird shown inside one of the coops at unloading that appeared to be unable to stand that should not have been loaded at the farm and transported to the plant.

I am unaware of the plant's policies on unfit birds and what standards the employees are trained to. Recommend the review of policies and training program. Retrain all employees and implement zero tolerance for the shackling of unfit birds.

All birds observed on shackle line pre-stunning were properly shackled (both legs properly placed in shackles) with very little wing flapping observed.

Though unable to determine how long shackle lines were stopped, I did note concern about how long the birds were left hanging on the stopped line and birds showing indicators of distress. I am not aware of what the plant policy for line shut down is and how long birds are allowed to hang before being removed (ie. if line stopped for 15 minutes or more, birds will be removed from shackles).

I am unaware of the plant's policies for line shut-downs and what standards the employees are trained to. Policy should be reviewed to insure bird welfare is taken fully into consideration for line shut-downs and current policies are acceptable.

Standard stunning practices allow for birds to be rendered immediately unconscious through the submersion of the head of the bird into an electrical water bath. The birds should exit the water bath with a flacid (limp head) showing no signs of consciousness including blinking, vocalizations or rhythmic breathing. The shackle line is adjusted to bird size to allow for full submersion of the head to insure effective stunning. All birds observed on the video showed no signs of consciousness as they departed the water bath.

There did not appear to be an issue with effective stunning in video footage provided.

Following stunning, birds are mechanically cut and proceed down a bleed line. A backup cutter is stationed on this line to identify and hand cut any bird that may have been missed by the mechanical knife. This two-step process is to insure all birds are effectively cut and bled out before entering the scalding tank.

For an animal welfare audit, a plant is allowed <10 birds per 500 observed to have been missed by the mechanical knife. From the video provided, all birds that were not cut appeared to have been identified by the backup cutter and manually cut. All except one of the uncut birds appeared to be insensible while on bleed line. (I would like to note here that the "gasping" (like a fish out of water) observed in the birds on the bleed line is not to be mistaken for rhythmic breathing. This is a common occurrence with electrical stunning and is not a sign of sensibility.

Due to editing I was unable to determine the true ratio of uncut birds to cut birds on line, but it appeared that there were several birds that required hand cutting after being missed by the mechanical cutter. There were also birds that appeared to have been cut, but the cut was very high up on the neck, close to the jaw and the backup cutter was applying secondary cuts lower on the neck. One bird appeared to have been cut on the front of the face. I also observed variations in bird size and that not all birds were able to properly pass through the knife.

As stated above, I was unable to determine the actual ratio of cut to uncut birds but recommend the plant review this area to insure the number of uncut birds is within (and stays within) acceptable parameters. The plant must be diligent in making sure the knife is adjusted to bird size to insure that all birds will pass through the mechanical cutter and that the cut is properly placed on the neck.

Following stunning and bleeding, the birds enter the scald tank for the purpose of feather removal. Only birds that are effectively stunned and cut are allowed to enter the scald tank. If a sensible/uncut bird enters scald tank, the plant will automatically fail an animal welfare audit. No sensible/uncut birds were observed entering the scald tank in any of the video provided.

There was though, what appeared to be a “Red Bird” in the video on the floor that showed no indicators that it had been cut before entering the scald tank. This would be an automatic failure for a plant if found during an animal welfare audit. Circumstances around this bird are unknown but all plants must take all precautions necessary to insure that no uncut birds enter the scald tank.

The birds shown in the lairage were all in good condition and showed no signs of distress. The coops were stocked at proper density and the plant was providing environmental management for bird comfort through the use of fans.

A bird that had been run over was found underneath the tire of a truck. All plants should have policies in place to insure all loose birds are caught and placed back in coops to prevent such incidents. Employees and drivers must continually monitor loose birds in lairage.

For the most part, the employees seemed to be very aware of company policy and did share it with the undercover operative. They understood why birds needed to be insensible and cut before entering the scalding tank and that animal abuse was unacceptable and must be reported to supervisors immediately. They acknowledged to the undercover operative that running over a bird was not a good thing, acknowledging the seriousness of the situation. The backup cutter had a very detailed understanding of the entire turkey production process.

The employees seemed methodical, yet not aggressive or abusive in the handling of the birds at unloading, shackling or on the bleed line. There was a point in the video where the backup cutter had ahold of a bird's head and the undercover operative asked him what he was doing. The employee replied he was, “... just F\*\*\*\* around,” but I was unable to tell what he was doing.

The video showed an employee tossing a bird's head to another employee. This is disrespectful and should not be considered acceptable.

The words or language the employees choose to use to describe processes were graphic and may have come across as brash and harsh at times, but I did not feel that the employees lacked respect or empathy for the animals when speaking about them or policy. The impression I did pick up from the employees though was low morale at times and not an overly positive impression of turkey production. The company needs to address the morale and culture of the personnel they employ and the work environment.

## Conclusions

### **Dr. Newberry:**

I would recommend additional training of the employees which should include not only ensuring an understanding of what is not permissible but also increased information about the raising of turkeys in general, and the continual work being undertaken to improve and assure turkey welfare.

I also commend the plant in committing to update their equipment to the latest gas stunning technology, which avoids the shackling of live birds prior to stunning.

### **Dr. Petrik:**

In general, the treatment of the turkeys seen in the video was gentle and compassionate. The birds were all hung by both legs and were not treated aggressively. I don't believe that unnecessary pain or suffering is being caused by the handling or processes in the video.

The training of the workers seems to be effective for the processes, because the birds are handled well and effectively, but they seem to be poorly informed as to how their actions integrate with the entire process. Also, it appears some of the training might be lacking in details, such as to which types of injuries should cause the birds to be humanely euthanized.

The attitudes of the workers were respectful with the exception of the worker who struck a bird, and the person seen tossing the head of a decapitated bird. Neither of these incidents would have caused undue injury to the birds, in my opinion, but show a lack of respect.

The knowledge of the workers might be limited. When giving opinions on things that were not directly related to their job, such as illnesses or conditions in barns, the workers were not very knowledgeable.

It is important to note that "red birds" (birds that have not been rendered insensible before going through the scalding tank) can be caused by improper stunning, being missed by the backup person, and also by insufficient bleeding of a properly-stunned bird. In one segment of the video, a bird is briefly seen on the floor. This bird had an obvious slit in its neck, indicating that it may have been insufficient bleeding.

My advice to the plant would be to educate the employees at a higher level. Giving a more holistic view of the slaughter process and information on why some of the decisions are made in the manner that they are, will help with understanding of the overall welfare and processes. The workers seem to be capable of doing their jobs properly, but lack an understanding of how this all fits in the big picture.

Implementing Controlled Atmospheric Stunning will be an advantage as well. This change in stunning technology requires a vast overhaul of the trucking industry, the slaughter plants and modifications to many barns, so there must be time allowed for this overhaul of the industry to occur.

### **Ms. Woods:**

As noted throughout my report, there are areas where attention and improvements are required but I did not observe any outright egregious acts of abuse in any of the videos I reviewed. Though electrical stunning of poultry is an acceptable and humane method of slaughter for poultry, I do believe that the use of Controlled Atmosphere Stunning (CAS) is a more sustainable option that provides welfare benefits to the birds.

### **Animal Care Review Panel program**

Video investigations at livestock and poultry 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 program. Expert panels operate independently. Their reviews, assessments, recommendations and reports are not submitted to the poultry 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. Ruth C. Newberry**

Norwegian University of Life Sciences  
Washington State University

Dr. Newberry received her B.Sc. in Biology and Ph.D. in Agriculture from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. She conducted research on poultry behavior and welfare for Agriculture and Agri-food Canada before moving to Washington State University in 1996. She is now at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences where her research is focused on environmental enrichment, social behavior, and assessment of affective states. She also teaches courses on applied animal behavior and welfare. Dr. Newberry has served as President of the International Society for Applied Ethology, Secretary of the Canadian Expert Committee on Farm Animal Behaviour and Welfare, Chair of the Poultry Science Association's Animal Care Committee, and member of the Scientists Committee for the Canadian Code of Practice on Laying Hens.

### **Dr. Mike Petrik, DVM**

Dr. Petrik has worked with poultry his entire life, having grown up on a large poultry farm with turkeys, laying hens, and broiler chickens. He graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College in 1998, and received his MSc in Animal Welfare from the University of Guelph in 2014. He has been a fulltime poultry veterinarian for 16 years. Dr. Petrik was program lead for the \$2M IMPACT program through Farm and Food Care, a multi-species Animal Welfare education program. He developed a national Hatchery Welfare Program with the Canadian Hatchery Federation and a euthanasia training program that has been delivered to every egg producer in Ontario, and has been delivered across Canada to broiler and laying hen organizations to act as the training platform for the euthanasia portion of their animal care program. Dr. Petrik has been a member of the Scientific Committee for the development of the National Farm Animal Care Council codes of Practice for Breeders, Chickens and Turkeys as well as the Code of Practice for Laying hens. He is also a member of the NFACC Code of Practice Development Committee for the Laying Hen Code

### **Jennifer Woods**

An Animal Care and Welfare specialist based out of Blackie, Alberta, Canada, Woods obtained her undergraduate degree in Animal Science at Colorado State University and her Masters degree in Veterinary Preventative Medicine - Animal Welfare from Iowa State University. She has over 25 years experience with production livestock and has been collaborating with the livestock industry in all aspects of animal welfare and care since 1998. She has been a professional Animal Auditor Certification Organization (PAACO) certified processing plant auditor and instructor for other auditors since 2007 and is the lead trainer and developer for Canadian Livestock Transport (CLT) Certification program. 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. Her work has been used globally to audit, train and improve farm animal welfare.