



Animal Welfare Institute

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June 22, 2010

Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board
Ohio Department of Agriculture
8995 E. Main Street
Reynoldsburg, OH 43068

RE: Euthanasia of Farm Animals

Dear Members of the Board:

I am writing on behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) to offer recommendations regarding the setting of standards for on-farm euthanasia of animals raised for food. We understand that euthanasia will be the first animal care issue addressed by the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board.

Since its founding in 1951, AWI has been alleviating suffering inflicted on animals by people. Major goals of the organization include abolishing factory farms and achieving humane slaughter and transport for all animals raised for food. In 2006 AWI launched a high-welfare food labeling program called Animal Welfare Approved (AWA). As part of this program AWA collaborates with scientists and farmers to set animal care standards. The program employs a highly trained field staff to audit farms for compliance with these standards, and communicates regularly with family farmers in dozens of states including Ohio. The program covers the full lives of the animals from birth through slaughter.

Euthanasia Defined

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *euthanasia* as “the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals (as persons or animals) in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy.” This definition is consistent with AWI’s – and we believe most people’s – concept of the term.

Farm animals may be killed for a number of reasons other than for use as food. These reasons include illness or injury, disease control, property damage, risk of harm to people or other animals, or due to a perceived lack of production or reproduction potential. While AWI considers only killing for serious illness or injury to constitute euthanasia, our recommendations apply to the killing of farm animals for any purpose other than human consumption.

Federal/State Laws

A spokeswoman for the Livestock Care Standards Board was recently quoted in the press as saying that euthanasia of farm animals falls “under laws by the U.S. Department of Agriculture” and therefore “the board will be just reinforcing the federal laws.”¹ In fact, there are no federal laws or regulations governing the welfare of animals raised for food while on the farm, with the exception of animals slaughtered on-farm under the auspices of a federally- or state-inspected mobile slaughter operation.² The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), as a matter of policy, complies with the euthanasia guidelines of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)³ in killing wildlife for damage control and in conducting mass killings of farm animals for disease control purposes; however, adherence to these guidelines is not required by law.

New Jersey is the only state, to date, to enact a law or regulation specifically governing euthanasia of farm animals.⁴ However, individual state animal cruelty laws may apply to the killing of farmed animals, and charges under these laws have been brought in several states, including Ohio, regarding the manner in which animals have been killed on the farm.⁵

Voluntary Guidelines

In 2005 the World Organization for Animal Health (known by “OIE,” the acronym of its historical name, the Office International des Epizootics) established international guidelines for the killing of animals for disease control purposes.⁶ In the U.S., the AVMA publishes euthanasia guidelines, mentioned above, which are periodically reviewed and revised as recommended by a euthanasia panel. The AVMA guidelines attempt to address the killing of all species, for all purposes, and are therefore not specific to the killing of farm animals for non-slaughter purposes. However, specialty veterinary practitioner associations and individual schools of veterinary medicine have published various guides for the euthanasia of individual farm animal species.⁷ In addition, industry producer trade associations, such as the National Chicken Council and the United Egg Producers, and animal welfare food labeling programs, such as

¹ D. Jones, “Animal lovers differ on proposed reform,” The News-Herald, June 10, 2010. <http://www.news-herald.com/articles/2010/06/10/news/nh2590306.txt>.

² In this case, the regulations of the federal Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (9 CFR Part 313) apply.

³ American Veterinary Medical Association, AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia (formerly the Report of the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia), June 2007. http://www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/euthanasia.pdf.

⁴ New Jersey adopted and incorporated by reference the acceptable methods of euthanasia as defined in AVMA’s Guidelines on Euthanasia. See New Jersey Administrative Code Title 2, Department of Agriculture Chapter 8, Humane Treatment of Domestic Livestock.

⁵ The prosecution of members of the Wiles family for animal cruelty by Wayne County, Ohio, was profiled in the 2009 HBO documentary, *Death on a Factory Farm*.

⁶ OIE, Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Chapter 7.6, Killing of Animals for Disease Control Purposes, 2009. http://www.oie.int/Eng/normes/mcode/en_chapitre_1.7.6.pdf. While written to address killing for disease control, the guidelines note that its general principles “should also apply when animals need to be killed for other purposes such as after natural disasters or for culling animal populations.”

⁷ See for example, American Association of Bovine Practitioners, *Practical Euthanasia of Cattle: Considerations for the Producer, Livestock Market Operator, Livestock Transporter, and Veterinarian*, no date; American Association of Swine Veterinarians & the National Pork Board, *On-Farm Euthanasia of Swine: Recommendations for the Producer*, 2008.

Animal Welfare Approved and Certified Humane, address euthanasia in their respective animal care standards.⁸

AWI Recommendations

AWI offers the following recommendations for the drafting of regulations related to on-farm euthanasia of animals raised for food:

1. OIE guidelines should be adopted.

AWI recommends adoption of the OIE guidelines on killing for disease control purposes as euthanasia standards for non-slaughter killing of farm animals in Ohio, with two exceptions (noted in points #2 and #3 below). AWI prefers OIE over AVMA guidelines on the basis that the OIE guidelines 1) were developed specifically for the non-slaughter killing of farm animals, 2) were implemented as the result of a comprehensive expert and public consultation process and adopted by an international body representing 176 countries, and 3) have been more recently revised and are based on more updated scientific research.

2. Rabbits should be added to OIE guidelines.

More than one million rabbits are raised in the U.S. each year for meat and/or fur. In 2007, 438 Ohio farms sold a total of 25,818 rabbits.⁹ OIE does not address rabbits in its euthanasia guidelines; however, the methods recommended for poultry (with the exception of maceration for day-old chicks) are also appropriate for rabbits.¹⁰ Therefore, AWI recommends that the Ohio euthanasia regulations provide for rabbits to be handled as poultry under the OIE guidelines.

3. Electrocution, as a method of killing, should not be allowed.

Euthanasia by electrocution requires special skills and equipment that make its on-farm use extremely unlikely. Because animals do not lose consciousness for 10 to 30 seconds or more after application of electricity, animals must be rendered unconscious first, although a one-step stunning and electrocution method has been used for killing sheep and pigs. The AVMA includes electrocution as a “conditionally acceptable” method of euthanasia for ruminants and pigs but notes that “its disadvantages far outweigh its advantages in most applications.”¹¹ Killing by electrocution is generally inappropriate for on-farm application and allowing its use increases the possibility that individuals may attempt to kill animals with a common 120V electrical cord.

⁸ It should be noted that a fair amount of disagreement currently exists regarding the acceptability of various methods among the different sets of U.S. and international standards.

⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2007 Census of Agriculture: State Data, 2009, p. 25.

¹⁰ See review of recommended methods for euthanizing rabbits in AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia, p. 28.

¹¹ AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia, p. 15.

4. Specific warnings regarding gunshot use should be included.

AWI has concerns regarding gunshot as a means of euthanasia, while acknowledging it as one of a relatively small number of methods readily available to most farmers. In order for gunshot to be a humane method of killing it must be delivered by properly functioning equipment in the hands of a highly trained individual. Unfortunately, this is often not the circumstance under which on-farm killing occurs.

The following incidents occurred at licensed Ohio slaughter plants, where it is expected that employees would be adequately trained in stunning or killing animals via gunshot¹²:

- On Monday November 9, 2009 during the beef slaughter it was noted that proper stunning was not being performed, or rather, the stunning was ineffective due to a deficiency in equipment or application.... The second beef, a cow at least 8 years of age, was shot with a .22 rifle a minimum of 8 times. The shots were immediate and sequential, and the beef's head and body were properly restrained in the knock box. The shots were ineffective as the beef continued to look directly at the shooter until the last shot that caused her to become insensitive.... The third beef was younger than one year old. Head and body properly restrained in the knock box, this beef was shot twice and remained standing. The gun jammed and it was nearly 5 minutes before the beef could be shot the third and final time.¹³
- The bull was brought into the knock box about 0800 and was shot with a .22 caliber rifle two times before he fell and that attracted my interest. I heard the bull breathing and I kept track of each time that [plant employee] had to fire in an attempt to stop the animal from breathing and render it insensible. The bull was close to 2,000 lbs and fell in such a way that the gate on the knock box would not open. The animal's head was against the knock box, so the shots were not optimal.... After many shots [plant employee] finally hooked the carcass hoist to the gate and allowed the bull to fall from the knock box. After more shots and while still breathing, the bull's throat was cut while he was lying on the floor. I kept track of the number of shots and [plant employee] had shot 56 times.¹⁴
- At around 7:40 am while performing my kill floor duties, I observed an employee shoot a market hog with a .22 caliber rifle. The employee required at least 7 shots in order to render the hog unconscious.¹⁵

AWI recommends that Ohio euthanasia regulations state emphatically that lethal gunshot landmarks vary significantly by species, as does the amount of force required to penetrate the skull and, as a result, that anyone attempting to use gunshot as a method of euthanasia must confirm accurate targeting and appropriate caliber of ammunition. It should also be noted that when an animal can be properly restrained, the penetrating captive bolt is a preferred method of killing.¹⁶

¹² Incidents excerpted from state slaughterhouse records, obtained through public record request submitted by AWI to the Ohio Department of Agriculture in November 2009.

¹³ Ohio Department of Agriculture, Noncompliance Record #0019-2009-9844, 11/09/09.

¹⁴ Ohio Department of Agriculture, Noncompliance Record #0005-2008-9756, 3/21/08.

¹⁵ Ohio Department of Agriculture, Noncompliance Record #0004-2008-9863, 8/15/08.

¹⁶ AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia, p. 13-14.

5. AVMA conditionally acceptable methods should not be allowed for routine killing.

If the Board should decide to adopt the euthanasia guidelines of the AVMA it is imperative that the regulations clarify whether only “acceptable” or both “acceptable” and “conditionally acceptable” methods will be allowed. AVMA defines “conditionally acceptable” methods as “those techniques that by the nature of the technique or because of greater potential for operator error or safety hazards might not consistently produce humane death or are methods not well documented in the scientific literature.”¹⁷ Conditionally acceptable methods include electrocution (addressed in point #3 above), gunshot (addressed in point #4), cervical dislocation in poultry, and blow to the head in young pigs. AWI’s concerns regarding cervical dislocation and blow to the head are described below:

Cervical dislocation – While AVMA authorizes its use conditionally, the association points out that loss of consciousness with the method may not be instantaneous and that there are few scientific studies to confirm the assumption that the technique is humane.¹⁸ OIE guidelines require that poultry be rendered unconscious prior to manual or mechanical dislocation¹⁹, and the Humane Slaughter Association recommends electrical stunning of poultry before cervical dislocation is performed.²⁰

Blow to the head – OIE guidelines do not include this method of killing for any species. In addition, AVMA notes that a blow to the head “must be properly applied to be humane and effective”²¹, and the National Pork and American Association of Swine Veterinarians, recognizing concerns regarding the method, indicate they support additional research on methods of neonatal pig euthanasia.²²

In our experience, cervical dislocation and blow to the head are among the killing methods most often performed improperly. Before proposing routine use of these methods, we encourage the Board to consider how these practices may be misused by inadequately trained individuals, and the animal suffering that will result.²³ **AWI recommends that if conditionally acceptable methods are to be allowed, that their use is strictly limited to emergency situations where more humane means are not readily available, and the animal would suffer if euthanasia was postponed.**

¹⁷ AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia, p. 3.

¹⁸ AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia, p. 14.

¹⁹ OIE Killing of Animals for Disease Control Purposes, p. 22.

²⁰ Humane Slaughter Association, Poultry Slaughter (web page), no date.
<http://www.hsa.org.uk/Information/Slaughter/Poultry%20slaughter.htm>.

²¹ AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia, p. 32.

²² On-Farm Euthanasia of Swine, p. 13.

²³ Videos showing birds being killed by neck wringing/twisting/swinging are available at <http://www.mercyforanimals.org/maine-eggs/>, <http://www.mercyforanimals.org/norco/> and <http://www.mercyforanimals.org/CAEggs/>. A video of piglets being killed by blunt trauma to the head is available at <https://secure.peta.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=1131>.

6. Prohibited methods of killing should be specified.

In addition to adopting standards for acceptable euthanasia methods, it is advisable that the regulations spell out which methods of killing are not, under any circumstances, acceptable. These methods include but may not be limited to the following:

- Blow to the head or body (other than from a captive bolt device)
- Burning
- Drowning
- Exsanguination (except in sedated, stunned or anesthetized animals)
- Hypothermia or rapid freezing
- Maceration (other than for day-old birds)
- Poisons (including cyanide and strychnine)
- Strangulation

7. Disposal of living animals should be prohibited.

State euthanasia regulations should require that death be verified after euthanasia and before disposal of the animal.²⁴ Regulations must state that live animals shall not be placed or thrown into manure pits, trash receptacles, or onto piles of dead animals. Moreover, regulations must also provide that the euthanasia method be re-administered to any animal still showing signs of life after the initial attempt.

Conclusion

AWI appreciates the opportunity to offer recommendations on farm animal care standards for Ohio, and looks forward to seeing our views incorporated in the proposed regulations on euthanasia. Please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at 202-446-2146 or email at dena@awionline.org if you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,



Dena Jones, M.S.
Farm Animal Program Manager

²⁴ AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia, p. 4.