

(Statement to U.S. Chicken Suppliers on Killing by Decompression)

December 14, 2010

We're writing to express our concerns about vacuum stunning, or low-atmospheric pressure killing (LAPK or LAPS). Although there are some promising aspects of the most recent research into this slaughter method—by Thaxton *et al.*—the evidence to date does not offer meaningful data to support claims that LAPK is humane, nor does it answer many critical questions about the birds' experience from an animal welfare perspective.

Renowned animal welfare expert Dr. Temple Grandin echoed these concerns upon reviewing the most recent data:

The description of the behavior, time to loss of posture and first wing flapping is confusing. For good bird welfare, it is essential that wing flapping occur after the birds lose posture. When loss of posture occurs, the birds have probably lost consciousness and sensibility. If I am reading the table correctly, the loss of posture is occurring either at the same time or slightly before wing flapping. The behavioral reactions are poorly described in this paper.

Further, the Thaxton report asserts that gas trapped in birds' abdomens (which would cause pain during decompression) is unlikely. However, Dr. Mohan Raj, senior research fellow in food animal science at the University of Bristol, has expressed concern about the probable bird welfare consequences of ruptured air sacs and guts in conscious birds during LAPK, which the most recent research does not address. Dr. Raj states, "Gases produced within the intestinal tract, including caecum, may not always escape passively; i.e. expansion of gases trapped in the gut will cause painful rupture. This may lead to internal contamination of carcasses with faeces, which is [also] a public health and food safety issue." Also, birds with respiratory infections (which are common because of ammonia and dust exposure) may experience severe pain during vacuum stunning since the infection would interfere with air sac expansion.

Additionally, there are insufficient data regarding EEG and EKG results in birds while undergoing this method, as well as regarding birds' aversion to the decompression process. Further testing is warranted in order to determine the point at which birds become unconscious and whether or not the process causes anxiety, distress, or pain.

The pain and distress associated with decompression killing led the American Veterinary Medical Association to oppose the practice and many states to categorically ban the procedure. While a Colorado-based group called American Humane has endorsed LAPS, we understand that it did so without consulting all members of its Farm Animal Welfare Scientific Advisory Committee and without having answered the numerous critical questions outlined above.

By contrast, controlled-atmosphere killing (CAK or CAS) offers the greatest animal welfare potential among available poultry slaughter methods and is recommended by animal welfare scientists including Drs. Temple Grandin, Mohan Raj, and Ian Duncan as well as by numerous animal protection agencies. H. Scott Hurd, D.V.M., Ph.D., and former acting under secretary for

the USDA's Office of Food Safety stated, “The general consensus among many researchers in the United States, European Union (EU) and Japan is that CAS is more humane than the current method of electrical stunning[.]”

Because of the numerous critical unanswered questions regarding the impact of vacuum stunning, we cannot encourage a commercial switch to it at this time. We look forward to reviewing future data as they become available.

Please let us know if you have any questions. We welcome further dialog on this issue. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ingrid E. Newkirk, President
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

Cathy Liss, President
Animal Welfare Institute

Philip Lymbery, Chief Executive
Compassion in World Farming

Silia Smith, Interim Executive Director, U.S.
World Society for the Protection of Animals

Paul Shapiro, Sr. Director
The Humane Society of the United States

Dr. Steven Gross, Chief Executive Officer
Farm Forward

Debra Probert, Executive Director
Vancouver Humane Society

Nathan Runkle, Executive Director
Mercy For Animals