



Working to Make Slaughter More **HUMANE** for Poultry

AWI and Farm Sanctuary, working with the Animal Law Clinic at Lewis & Clark Law School, have petitioned the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to develop regulations governing the handling of chickens, turkeys and other birds at slaughter. The petition calls for USDA to write regulations to address bird handling and slaughter practices that result in adulterated products, as is the department's duty under the Poultry Products

Inspection Act (PPIA).

The PPIA defines "adulterated" to include products from birds who have died by means other than by slaughter, or if the product is unhealthy or unwholesome. Under its authority to regulate adulterated products, USDA condemns or downgrades poultry products from birds with bruises and other bodily injuries—which often result from inhumane handling. Inhumane

handling can occur either as a result of a conventional industry practice or intentional acts of abuse by workers.

In 2005, after the exposure of incidents of intentional cruelty at several US poultry plants, USDA acknowledged the connection between inhumane handling of birds and adulteration. It instructed the industry to handle birds in accordance with "good commercial practices" (GCP), on the basis that birds who have been treated humanely are less likely to be bruised or to die other than by slaughter. About that time, USDA in-plant inspectors and humane slaughter experts began conducting GCP reviews, and citing plants in official reports and memorandums for any observed violations.

USDA failed to define GCP in regulation, however, opting instead to defer to weak industry guidelines. Furthermore, oversight of GCP in plants that handle birds is infrequent and uneven among USDA field offices. For example, only 21 percent of federal poultry plants received a formal GCP review by a humane slaughter veterinarian during a recent 18-month period, even though the department's

TIMELINE OF EFFORTS TO PROTECT

Congress passes law requiring humane slaughter but birds not included **1958**

Congress fails to pass separate bills to add coverage for birds **1991-1995**

USDA denies petition to require humane handling under food safety rules **1995**

policy is to audit all plants. Moreover, there was no documentation of humane handling activities of any kind at approximately half of all federal poultry plants during that time.

Requiring that plants follow GCP (which include some measures to prevent inhumane handling) for the stated purpose of reducing product adulteration is an attempt to provide protection for birds without amending the federal Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA). The HMSA requires that animals killed for meat are made “insensible to pain” before they are shackled, hoisted, and cut. Current HMSA regulations do not cover poultry, however, because USDA claims that it lacks the legal authority to include birds under the humane slaughter law. Animal welfare advocates took USDA to court over the issue on two occasions during the past decade. Both lawsuits were ultimately dismissed. Animal advocates have also tried unsuccessfully to change the law itself; three times during the 1990s, bills to explicitly mandate the application of HMSA requirements to poultry were introduced in Congress, without success.

While USDA’s authority to cover birds under the humane slaughter law may be debatable, the department clearly has authority to address many forms of inhumane handling and slaughter under the provisions of the PPIA. USDA, through its official notices and directives, has acknowledged the causal connection between inhumane handling of birds and adulterated poultry products. Without regulation, however, compliance by the industry with GCP, as well as enforcement by inspection personnel, will remain inadequate.

In fact, humane handling of poultry is poised to take a huge step backward. A proposed change to the poultry inspection regulations—expected to be finalized in 2014—would allow poultry companies to accelerate their slaughter process by 25 percent, increasing the likelihood of inhumane handling and the resulting animal suffering. Now more than ever, it is crucial that humane handling regulations be enacted to protect the 9 billion chickens, turkeys and other birds slaughtered for meat in the United States each year. 🐔

HOW BIRDS ARE MISTREATED AT SLAUGHTER

There are a number of ways in which inhumane handling of birds can result in adulterated poultry products. The most common problem (and the most significant in terms of animal welfare) involves live birds entering the scalding-water tank and drowning—which occurs when birds are not stunned or bled properly. Other inhumane actions cited by USDA include:

- + Tossing live birds in trash bins where they are eventually crushed or smothered by other discarded bodies or refuse.
- + Driving over or stepping on loose birds on the ground.
- + Carrying birds by their neck or wings instead of by both legs.
- + Killing injured birds by unacceptable methods such as hitting, kicking and stomping.
- + Holding birds in transport crates for longer than 15 hours without protection from extreme heat or cold.
- + Shackling and hanging birds upside down by one leg or a wing; allowing birds to hang this way for extended periods.

BIRDS AT SLAUGHTER

