

Voluntary Animal Handling Guidelines and Training

Recognizing that good animal handling is both ethically appropriate and economically beneficial, in the 1990s, the meat packing industry initiated a number of progressive steps to improve animal handling and stunning. Working closely with leading experts in the field of animal science, the Foundation's efforts have resulted in quantifiable improvements in animal handling in meat packing plants.

The AMI Foundation now offers a wide array of videos, guidelines and an annual conference on animal care and handling.

Recommended Animal Handling Guidelines for Meat Packers — 1991; Updated 2003

In 1991, Dr. Temple Grandin of Colorado State University authored the American Meat Institute's first ever *Recommended Animal Handling Guidelines for Meat Packers*. Since 1991, the guidelines have been updated, translated into Spanish and distributed around the world.

The illustrated guidelines are based upon the federal Humane Slaughter Act, but take the Act a step further. The guidelines offer packers specific advice and ideas on how to prevent injuries and bruises in livestock, how to design chutes so that livestock naturally move forward with minimal prodding, how to unload animals safely to prevent injury, and how to determine the stress levels caused to animals by heat and humidity.

Grandin also gives very specific information on how to stun animals properly. The guidelines advise workers on techniques for handling livestock to minimize their stress. Illustrations show, for example, how "cripple" carts can be used to lift and move disabled livestock to minimize discomfort.

A survey of AMI members in 1996 showed that two-thirds of plants had implemented these guidelines voluntarily, and 94 percent of those who had implemented them observed improvements in animal handling in their plants. This survey also showed that 80 percent of those surveyed had purchased equipment to improve handling and 50 percent had retained a consultant to help improve handling.

Good Management Practices for Animal Handling and Stunning — 1997; Updated 2003

In 1996, through survey of plants done for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Grandin determined that it was possible to objectively score and assess handling and stunning practices in meat packing plants. Grandin submitted detailed criteria to USDA – criteria that were incorporated into *Good Management Practices for Handling and Stunning*, authored by Dr. Grandin and released by the AMI Foundation in 1997.

The GMPs encourage industry to measure handling and stunning in five core areas: 1) slips and falls; 2) electric prod use; 3) livestock vocalizations; 4) stunner accuracy; and 5) insensibility. Dr. Grandin has written extensively that "You manage what you measure." By self-auditing regularly, plants can identify and address problems rapidly and track positive progress. An AMI survey done in 2001 showed that more than 90 percent of respondents routinely perform self-audits.

Animal Care and Handling Conference

In February 1999, the AMI Foundation hosted its first Animal Handling and Stunning Conference,

now called the Animal Care and Handling Conference for the Food industry.

The first conference, attended by 130 members of the industry, provided a day-long overview of good animal handling practices and how to objectively evaluate these practices. Attendees also learned of the many quality and efficiency benefits that can be derived from progressive animal handling practices. Due to its popularity, the Foundation has made this conference an annual event with four tracks: beef, pork, poultry and egg production. In 2003, nearly 350 people attended the conference, which was co-sponsored by eleven other organizations.

Training Videos — 1999

In conjunction with the launch of the course, AMIF developed the first training videos designed to instruct in key handling and stunning practices. The 15-minute tapes were developed through a grant from McDonald's Corporation and with technical assistance from Grandin Livestock Handling Systems.

Good Animal Handling Practices for Beef Processors and *Good Animal Handling Practices for Pork Processors* explain both how to handle and stun animals effectively, and how to develop a self-audit system to ensure continued progress in animal handling. Sample audit and tracking sheets are provided with the tapes to facilitate the development of self-audit programs.

Spanish versions of the videos were released in 2002.

Animal Welfare Assistance Program – 2002

In 2002, the American Meat Institute Board of Directors voted to make animal welfare a non-competitive issue in the meat industry. As a result, members willingly share ideas and information that can enhance animal handling in meat plants.

As an outgrowth of this vote, AMI's Animal Welfare Committee developed the Animal Welfare Assistance Program, which offers round the clock assistance to any plant facing an animal handling or stunning challenge in its plant. By simply contacting AMI, a plant may tap into the collective knowledge of AMI's Animal Welfare Committee and will get a rapid response with ideas for solving the problem. If necessary, members of the committee will open their doors to competitors to assist in resolving problems.