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**AMERICAN MEAT INSTITUTE PRESIDENT SAYS UNDERCOVER VIDEO
REFLECTS MULTIPLE FAILURES AT PLANT,
IN GOVERNMENT AND AT ACTIVIST GROUP**

***AMI Says Situation Reflects Plant-Specific Failures and Does Not Reflect Industry-Wide
Problems; Record-Setting Class II Recall of Safe Meat Defies Common Sense***

Washington, DC, February 28, 2008 – An undercover video depicting animal abuse in a California meat plant reflects multiple problems – in plant practices, in inspection oversight at the plant and within the Humane Society of the United States. But according to AMI President J. Patrick Boyle, the images represent a shocking departure from both industry best practices and typical operations in federally inspected meat plants.

Boyle made his comments in testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies. He told the committee that despite the inhumane treatment of livestock, the record-setting Class II recall of safe meat products sends a mixed message to consumers. He challenged the lawmakers to consider why USDA is sending a mixed message by saying the meat poses only the remotest health risk, yet launching a record-setting recall.

“Proper and humane handling of livestock is not just a priority for AMI and its members – it is part of our culture,” Boyle said. He noted several key initiatives undertaken by the industry at AMI’s recommendation:

- 1991: AMI asked Dr. Temple Grandin, Ph.D. to write the first industry specific animal handling guidelines for the meat industry.
- 1997: AMI asks Dr. Grandin to translate her belief that animal welfare can be measured objectively into an audit that includes counting livestock vocalizations like moos and squeals, slips and falls, electric prod use and other factors.
- 1999: Major restaurant chains begin to require the “AMI Audit” as a condition of doing business.
- 1999: AMI launches Animal Care & Handling Conference to educate industry members about industry best practices.
- 2002: Institute votes to make animal welfare a non-competitive issue.
- 2006: AMI launches animalhandling.org to serve as an information resource for members of the industry and as a free download center for the AMI audit.

Boyle said that when Dr. Grandin proposed the idea of measuring criteria like vocalizations, many were initially skeptical. “I will confess that at the time, the idea of ‘counting moos’ sounded almost silly. Still, our forward-thinking Animal Welfare Committee agreed that the idea had merit, and Dr. Grandin again did a first for us: she wrote the first animal welfare audit ever developed.” He stressed that all of these initiatives were voluntarily undertaken by the industry.

“Our Animal Welfare Committee, and in turn our members, have been a force for change,” Boyle said. “Their business cards may carry the brands of many meat products you enjoy, and their titles may say plant manager or vice president of operations, but they are as much animal activists as any of the groups with ‘humane’ in their name that try to discredit these businesses.”

He noted that Dr. Grandin, who has extensive experience in meat plants across the country, also has said that she believes the video is not typical of industry practices in the testimony that she filed this week.

With respect to the Hallmark/Westland situation, Boyle said that multiple failures occurred at many levels that have now combined to a very tragic, but very plant-specific anomaly:

- First, failures occurred in the livestock production and transportation system that supplied cattle to the plant, Boyle said. “All efforts must be taken to minimize the arrival of “downers” at the slaughter facility. Our industry must lead an effort to enroll all beef and dairy producers in the Beef Quality Assurance and Dairy Quality Assurance Programs to maintain herd health and assure that only those animals that will pass federal inspection requirements are sent to slaughter,” he argued. “Specifically, the use of audits to measure animal welfare should be encouraged. In addition, livestock dealers and brokers should be required to provide documented training for employees in proper animal handling and transporting of animals.
- Secondly, failures occurred at the slaughter facility, he noted. “Plant personnel did not comply with the Humane Slaughter Act and the Federal Meat Inspection Act. In the future, all processing plant employees handling live animals should be certified for proficiency in proper animal handling procedures and have a thorough knowledge of the Humane Slaughter Act. I strongly recommend that plants use AMI’s handling guidelines and audit program,” he said.
- Thirdly, failures occurred within USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service, Boyle said. “A total of eight federal inspectors were stationed at the Hallmark/Westland facility. USDA must require that every inspector performing ante mortem inspection be certified for proficiency in animal handling and have a thorough knowledge of the Humane Slaughter Act and other FSIS guidance material,” Boyle said.
- Finally, Boyle said failures occurred at the Humane Society of the United States. “Its failure to alert immediately federal authorities to the practices captured on their video prolonged – almost condoned -- an illegal, inhumane practice and needlessly complicated the subsequent federal investigation. One can reasonably ask how such gross abuse could go unnoticed by so many for so long,” he said. “But one can also ask of the Humane Society how it could allow this abuse to continue for almost four months, while it edited its video for release to The Washington Post? In the future, we must all be committed to ensuring such practices do not occur, but whenever any of us become aware of such

abusive practices – by whatever means -- we must report them immediately to the proper authorities.”

Boyle also questioned the decision by USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service to initiate a Class II recall of this size and scope for a product that Secretary Shafer says “carries a very, very remote...risk”. He detailed that USDA has reported that the plant had effective food safety interventions and that all the product produced for the school lunch program tested negative for pathogens. “That being said, how do we find ourselves in the midst of the largest beef recall in the history of our country?” he asked.

“There is no doubt that rules matter and violations should have consequences. And for Hallmark/Westland there are severe consequences,” he said. “But from a public health perspective, risks matter too. In the future, under these circumstances, I believe USDA would be better advised to conduct an appropriate risk assessment before determining whether it should require a nationwide recall of a product when, according to Secretary Schafer, “there is no reason to believe that there’s anything wrong with (the) beef.”

For more information about AMI’s animal welfare initiatives, go to <http://www.animalhandling.org>.