



August 7, 2024

The Honorable Francis M. Hamilton III
U.S. Attorney
Eastern District of Tennessee

Via e-mail: trey.hamilton@usdoj.gov

Dear Mr. Hamilton:

I hope this letter finds you well. I'd like to request that your office collaborate with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) to investigate and file appropriate criminal charges against Harris Country Meats and its workers responsible for repeated violations of the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, which requires that animals be "rendered insensible to pain by a single blow ... or other means that is rapid and effective, before being shackled, hoisted ... or cut,"¹ at its slaughterhouse located at 480 Twin Barns Rd. in Greene County. The attached reports by the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) indicate that its staff recently slashed a conscious sheep's throat, repeatedly shot six animals in the head, and confined cows without water.

According to the reports, federal officials documented the following:

- On June 25, "The CSI [FSIS Consumer Safety Inspector] heard and saw the initial stun attempt with the [handheld captive-bolt gun] and observed that the stun had contacted the animal but was ineffective, as the animal was observed to remain standing upright and shaking [their] head with blood coming out of [their] nose. The CSI also noticed tracking eye movement. A second person on the slaughter floor then approached the animal with a knife and cut the throat of the still conscious animal. The animal then jumped, reacting to the cut, and shook [their] head more as [the animal] was still conscious and ultimately expired from the cut."²
- On September 15, 2023, a cow remained standing, bleeding from the head and vocalizing, after a worker shot her in the head.
- In February 2023, two pigs remained standing and crying out after a worker shot them in the head.

These violations follow those we brought to your attention in January of 2023:

¹U.S. Congress, Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, 7 U.S.C. § 1902(a), (1958) <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2015-title7/html/USCODE-2015-title7-chap48.htm>. Last accessed July 30, 2024.

²FSIS District 90 Manager Dr. Larry Davis, Notice of Suspension, Harris Country Meats (June 25, 2024) https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_file/documents/M20686-NOS_Harris_Country_Meats_Est_M20686_Redacted.pdf. Last accessed July 30, 2024.

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- On September 6, 2022, a pig was shot in the head with a rifle and left conscious and crying out.
- On August 23, 2022, an FSIS inspector saw a worker shoot a pig in the head with a rifle. Rather than stunning the animal, the shot left her standing and crying out.
- Between July 12 and August 16, 2022, four cows were found confined without water.
- On June 7, 2022, a federal agent saw a worker shoot a pig in the head with a rifle but fail to stun the animal, who remained standing. The worker shot the pig in the head a second time and again failed to render the animal unconscious.

The Federal Meat Inspection Act classifies such offenses as misdemeanors and imposes penalties of imprisonment for up to one year and/or a fine of up to \$1,000.³ The continuing inhumane handling at the establishment makes it clear that FSIS enforcement actions alone are insufficient to deter future violations and that criminal prosecution is in the best interests of both the animals being killed there and the public. Given that FSIS hasn't initiated a criminal prosecution of a licensed slaughterhouse for inhumane handling since *at least 2007* but claims that “[i]nvestigators from ... USDA’s [OIG] ... stand ready to work”⁴ with offices such as yours, we again respectfully ask that your office refer this matter to the USDA’s OIG so that it can file appropriate criminal charges against those responsible for these violations for your prosecution.

Please let us know if there’s anything we can do to assist you. I can be reached at ColinH@peta.org. Thank you for your consideration and for the difficult work that you do.

Sincerely,



Colin Henstock
Associate Director of Project Strategy

³U.S. Congress, United States Code: Meat Inspection, 21 U.S.C. §§ 676(a), (1982) <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2022-title21/pdf/USCODE-2022-title21-chap12-subchapIV-sec676.pdf>. Last accessed July 30, 2024.

⁴USDA FSIS, “Under Secretary for Food Safety Shares Some Insight on the Humane Handling of Livestock,” (January 7, 2011) <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2011/01/7/under-secretary-food-safety-shares-some-insight-humane-handling-livestock>. Last accessed July 30, 2024.