

International excellence (Audits around the world)

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Some people have voiced concerns that the quality of U.S. beef imports may be below our standards. During many trips to Australia and New Zealand I have found their export plants meet, and often exceed, U.S. standards. U.S. exports that come from Australia and New Zealand are certified by officials from the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and the European Union. The "export works" are first class. When walking from one department to the next, for example, visitors must wash their boots and hands. No street shoes are allowed in the plants.

I have also been surprised at the quality of plants I have visited in Chile, Brazil, Thailand and China. Many of these plants are either newly constructed or have recently been remodeled to achieve export certification. I was amazed to visit an export chicken plant in Thailand. It was the cleanest poultry processing facility I have ever seen. All the workers in the boning room wore masks and white clothes. When we visited the area that processed product for McDonald's we were issued white boots, white pants, white coats, hoods and masks.

Other features of these plants were their attractive exteriors and landscaping. The consensus among processors is that by making the plants look attractive, workers will have better attitudes. In the U.S. we have a tendency to always think that our things are the best in the world. However, if you have never been outside the box you cannot see outside the box. I have been outside the box and there is plenty for us to learn from other countries' plants.

I have worked with the McDonald's team on animal welfare audits in plants outside the U.S. Their audit results are similar to the excellent results that U.S. plants have received. Plants in Australia and New Zealand have maintained high standards for years. In South America, many plants are upgrading to comply with European standards. The one problem area among a lot of South American facilities is kosher slaughter. Many plants still restrain cattle for kosher slaughter by shackling and hoisting. Kosher slaughter can be done humanely if the proper equipment is used. They could benefit tremendously by installing modern, upright restraining equipment. South American plants that do kosher slaughter would fail the welfare audit, but the plants that do regular slaughter have bought modern stunners and many of them are excellent.

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