

Tracking fast-food audits

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The results of the 2001 animal handling and stunning audits show that the industry has maintained high standards for the past three years. When the results were averaged with data from McDonald's, Wendy's, a third party independent auditing company and the author's own audits, 91 percent of the beef plants passed the stunning audit.

A passing grade requires that a minimum of 95 percent of cattle be shot correctly with a single shot, and all cattle must be rendered insensible prior to slaughter. Results were consistent among the different auditors.

Table 1 shows data collected by three different auditors in three large fed-beef plants. All three packers had excellent internal auditing procedures for their stunning and handling systems. To maintain high standards, however, requires constant vigilance and perfection has not been achieved yet. During the 2001 audits, two of the 44 beef plants (5 percent) had poor stunning scores of 88 percent and 82 percent. One of the plants completely failed an audit with scores of 88 percent for stunning, 20 percent for vocalizing and 100 percent of the cattle were prodded with an electrical prod. The problems in this plant were attributed to poor management and sub-par employee training.

Overall the cattle vocalization scores improved in 2001 when compared to the previous year. Eighty-six percent of the beef plants passed and had less than 3 percent of their cattle vocalizing during handling and stunning. In previous years, the percentage of plants passing the vocalization audit was as low as 57 percent in 1999, and improved to 80 percent in 2000.

One of the big problem areas in 2001 was stunning bulls and cattle with heavy skulls. This requires a stunner that is in perfect working order. The use of a test stand (stun check) to measure the bolt velocity of captive bolt stunners is recommended. These testing units are now available for most brands of stunners.

Damp cartridges can also reduce bolt velocity. Cartridges should be stored in a dry location, such as the front office. Good stunner maintenance is essential and the plants with the best stunner maintenance have a person who is delegated to maintaining and repairing stunners.

Peak pork performance

Pork packers have been able to maintain high standards in the area of stunning. Eighty-eight percent of the 20 pork plants audited in 2001 passed the stunning audit for correct placement of the stunning wand. Seventy percent passed the electrical prod audit. To pass they had to move 75 percent or more of the pigs with a non-electrical device, such as a flag, paddle stick or a piece of poly pipe.

Audits found that lighting at restrainer entrances reduces balking and subsequent electrical prodding. One plant had two conveyor restrainers for pigs. The entrance to one of the restrainers was too dark, while the other was well lighted. An electrical prod had to be used on 33 percent of the pigs going into the dark restrainer and only 4 percent of the pigs going into the well-lighted restrainer. Animals are scared of the dark and many more pigs backed up at the dark restrainer.

Test drives

There is a marked difference among packers when it comes to driving pigs. Pigs from some producers are almost impossible to drive calmly. At one of the audited plants, a group of easy-to-drive pigs was compared with a group that was less cooperative. The easy-to-drive pigs squealed 20 percent of the time and the hard-to-drive pigs squealed 85 percent of the time.

An electric prod had to be used on 10 percent of the hard-to-drive pigs and only 4 percent of the easy-to-drive pigs. Another handling problem occurs with pigs that have been given too much Paylean growth promotant. Small amounts given to pigs are fine. However, if excessive doses are administered for too long of a period, pigs often refuse to move at plants. One such truckload was observed during the 2001 audits and it was impossible to unload the belly compartment of a "pot" trailer without an electrical prod. The pigs refused to move.

At several other plants there were problems with the design of the stunning wand. A poorly designed wand is difficult to position correctly. Two pork plants out of 17 had pigs that showed blinking or other signs of their returning to sensibility. Both of these plants had stunning wands that needed to be designed for better ergonomics. Poorly designed wands slide around and are difficult to keep in position.

Comparison of stunning scores from three different auditors in three different plants that used good internal auditing systems.

	Plant 1	Plant 2	Plant 3
Auditor 1	100%	98%	98%
Auditor 2	99%	100%	98%
Auditor 3	99%	100%	100%

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