

## The Ethical and Economic Reasons to Treat Animals Humanely

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There are those who would argue that the terms “humane slaughter” are contradictory terms. Arguing the use of animals for food is a philosophical debate that likely will never be resolved to everyone’s satisfaction. The vast majority of Americans choose to consume meat and poultry and rightfully expect that these products are derived from animals that are handled humanely.

Many religious laws from different faiths have formed the basis for modern animal care, handling and processing practices. One common theme among all faiths has been a respect for animals, avoidance of animal suffering and appreciation for the nourishment that they provide. These themes permeate the practices of the meat packing industry.

Regardless of their religious backgrounds, those who work in packing plants are concerned about livestock well-being and increasingly recognize the many benefits of humane handling and stunning.

### Economic Benefits of Humane Handling

In addition to a natural, human concern for animals, there are distinct economic benefits that result from humane handling.

When an animal is stressed due to heat, anxiety, rough treatment or environmental noise, meat quality can suffer. For example, if an animal becomes agitated in a plant, adrenalin is released.

In cattle, this can result in “dark cutters,” or dark spots, in meat. In hogs, adrenalin release can cause a condition called Pale Soft Exudative (PSE) tissue, which appears as pale, soft spots in pork. These quality defects cause direct economic losses to meat companies.

In addition, meat plants depend on a continuous supply of livestock moving through the plants in

order to maintain optimum efficiency. A stressed animal may balk and attempt to get out of a chute. This can cause other animals to become agitated, and may result in significant disruptions. Animals that are calm and well-handled typically will move through the chutes more easily, which enables the process to operate efficiently.

### Industry Survey

A 2001 survey of AMI members indicated that 82 percent of responding beef plants and 85 percent of responding pork plants said their animal handling and stunning programs and training efforts have resulted in some improvements in product quality. Fifteen percent of pork plants said the improvements were dramatic. (No beef plants reported dramatic quality improvements.)

Even on the farm, a strong incentive exists to treat animals humanely. For example, the use of electric prods causes breeding sows to fear people. Australian research has shown that sows that are fearful of people will farrow fewer piglets. Therefore, farmers who treat their livestock humanely will benefit from a higher yield. Clearly, nature has incentives optimal animal welfare by making it both ethically sound and economically beneficial.