

Statements From Scientific Experts re PETA's 2007 Investigation at Rubashkin's Nebraska Slaughterhouse

Academic and professional experts in animal welfare, veterinary medicine, and slaughter systems reviewed video footage from PETA's 2007 undercover investigation of Rubashkin's Nebraska slaughterhouse. The following are some of their statements.

“In each of the four [slaughters filmed by PETA], the cattle were fully conscious for a prolonged time Furthermore ... the assistant cut into the ear while the cattle were fully conscious and suffering in extreme pain. ... [I]t is my professional opinion that these animals ... showed clear evidence of consciousness and therefore would experience terror, pain, and extreme suffering, some for as long as 2 minutes, after their throats are cut. They would smell and be terrified by the large volumes of blood all around them and by the sight of the dangling carcasses immediately adjacent to them. Each animal evinced the range of behaviors indicating extreme panic in a bovine, including the plunging, struggling, bellowing, eye dilation, flaring of the nostrils, and tongue protrusion. This method of slaughter as depicted on this tape is brutal and should be amended to provide a humane end for these animals.”

—Dr. Holly Cheever

Dr. Cheever's degrees include an A.B. from Harvard University ('71, summa cum laude) and a D.V.M. from the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University (1980). After spending the summers during her veterinary school years milking cows on a Vermont dairy farm, she started her professional career as a dairy practitioner in Cortland County, a leading dairy region in Upstate New York. Dr. Cheever is a practicing veterinarian and cares for a small herd of cows on her farm near Albany, N.Y.

“When I was a boy learning the precepts embodied in the Jewish tradition, I was taught that the suffering of living things—*tsaar baallei chaim*—is morally and religiously intolerable. ... What is depicted in this video is a mockery of these precepts, and a disgrace to Orthodox Judaism. ... The drooling, the vocalizing, the manifest distress [depicted in the video] all serve to demonstrate that animal handling procedures at that abattoir are well below the threshold for acceptability. ... In this video ... the animals suffer while conscious for prolonged periods, in one case over two minutes. ... In the same vein, the evident insertion of the meat hook to increase bleeding is both inhumane and a violation of the principles of kashrut. The ripping out of ear tags before the animal is unconscious is equally morally and religiously illegitimate. The vocalization and struggling after the cut is made speak for themselves and evidence suffering and a callous disregard for that suffering that should be abhorrent to and condemned by all observant Jews.”

—Dr. Bernard Rollin

Dr. Rollin is a distinguished professor who received his Ph.D. from Columbia University (1972). He is the author of numerous articles and books, including The Unheeded Cry: Animal Consciousness, Animal Pain and Scientific Change and Farm Animal Welfare. He is one of the leading scholars in the field of animal consciousness, and he has given more than 1,000 lectures around the world.

“The [first] cow in this slaughter exhibited marked vocalization distress before, during, and after the initial severing jugular/carotid cut and exhibited prolonged consciousness after the procedure. This animal was sensate and struggling for nearly two minutes after the cut. ... [The second] animal exhibited prolonged consciousness and vocalization for between one and a half and two minutes after the initial cut was made. Furthermore, the ear was cut to remove ear tags while the animal was still conscious, resulting in a marked amount of additional pain and suffering for the animal. ... [The third] animal exhibited vocalization and struggling during and after the initial jugular/carotid cut indicating prolonged consciousness. An assistant used an instrument that appeared to be a meat hook to tear the carotid arteries/jugular veins and facilitate faster bleeding while the animal was still conscious, resulting in further pain and distress for this animal. ... [The fourth] animal exhibited extreme struggling and marked vocalization during and after the initial jugular/carotid cut as well as prolonged consciousness for over a minute following the cut, indicating distress and prolonged suffering.”

—Dr. Brenda Forsythe

Dr. Forsythe is a practicing veterinarian in California. In addition to her veterinary medical degree, she holds masters and doctoral degrees in animal science, with a special interest in large animal behavior. She has served as cochair of the California Veterinary Medical Association’s (CVMA) Animal Welfare Task Force, and she serves on the CVMA’s Board of Governors.

“More than 2 minutes elapsed after Shechita [in the first slaughter]. ... The cow’s eyes were tearing, blinking and not rolled back. The ears were also moving. The cow was not in a Moribund State. ... Within 40 seconds after Shechita [in the second slaughter], the Plant employee removes the metal state identification tag. This is unacceptable since the cow was still conscious and you can not remove or cut out parts of the cow. ... [In the third slaughter, a] Meat Hook and Knife is used on a conscious cow after Shechita. This is unacceptable since the cow was still alive. ... There was prolonged consciousness in the [fourth] cow following Shechita. The knife and hook was being used to tear the tissue apart to facilitate bleeding of the carcass. This is unacceptable since the cow is still conscious and can feel pain.”

—Dr. Lester Friedlander

Dr. Friedlander is a former USDA chief veterinary inspector and worked as a USDA slaughter line inspector for more than 10 years, including in kosher slaughter facilities. He was the USDA’s Veterinary Trainer of the Year in 1987.