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USDA Encourages Humane Slaughter of Animals

On 9 September, the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) published a reminder¹ to livestock establishments of their requirement to comply with the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA)². The US General Accounting Office (now called the US General Accountability Office) recently released a review³ of the frequency and scope of humane handling and slaughter violations, actions to enforce compliance, and the adequacy of existing resources to enforce the Act. We address this issue because of the importance of proper euthanasia of laboratory animals, large and small.

In 1978, the Congress passed the HMSA to ensure that cattle, sheep, pigs, and other animals destined for human consumption are handled and slaughtered humanely. The FSIS, which is responsible for enforcing the act, issued this reminder because of the recent increase in congressional and public interest in the humane treatment of animals, and because the number of incidents of noncompliance FSIS documented in livestock establishments has increased over the last three years².

The HMSA is implemented by FSIS humane handling and slaughter regulations⁴. The Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA)⁵ provides that "for the purpose of preventing the inhumane slaughtering of livestock, the Secretary [of Agriculture] shall cause to be made, by inspectors appointed for that purpose, an examination and inspection of the method by which cattle, sheep, swine, goats, horses, mules, and other equines are slaughtered and handled in connection with slaughter in the slaughtering establishments inspected under this chapter⁵."

FSIS encourages livestock establish-

REGULATION UPDATES

NIH to Facilitate Public Access to Research Results

On 17 September, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) published a request for public comments on its plans to facilitate enhanced public access to information on NIH health-related research^{7,8}. In the proposed plan, NIH-supported investigators will be expected to provide NIH with electronic copies of the final version of their manuscripts upon acceptance for publication. This would provide researchers with an alternate method to submitting copies of each publication in their annual or final progress reports. NIH will archive and make public these manuscripts in its digital repository, PubMed Central, six months after publication.

Comments can be sent to NIH via their website (http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/public_access/add.htm) or by email (publicaccess@nih.gov). The deadline for comments is 16 November.

ments to develop a systematic approach to ensure that they are meeting the requirements of the law during handling and slaughter⁶.

The HMSA identifies the following two humane methods of slaughter and handling:

- "All animals are rendered insensible to pain by a single blow or gunshot or an electrical, chemical or other means that is rapid and effective, before being shackled, hoisted, thrown, cast, or cut; or
- "By slaughtering in accordance with the ritual requirements of the Jewish faith or of any other religious faith that prescribes a method of slaughter whereby the animal suffers loss of consciousness by anemia of the brain caused by the simultaneous and instantaneous severance of the carotid arteries with a sharp instrument and handling in connection with such slaughtering²."

FSIS recommends that establishments "identify where and under what circumstances livestock may experience excitement, discomfort or accidental injury while being handled in connection with the slaughter process¹." Establishments are encouraged to design facilities and imple-

ment practices that will minimize discomfort and injury in accordance with existing regulations. Plants should periodically evaluate their system for effectiveness and improve or adjust operations accordingly. FSIS believes implementing these steps will serve to improve product quality and efficiency as well as enhance worker safety.

Specifically, FSIS recommends that establishments develop and maintain a systematic approach to meet the humane handling and slaughter requirements, and that establishments should:

- "Conduct an initial assessment of where and under what circumstances livestock may experience excitement, discomfort, or accidental injury while being handled in connection with slaughter and, except for establishments conducting ritual slaughter, where and under what circumstances stunning problems may occur;
- "Design facilities and implement practices that will minimize excitement, discomfort, and accidental injury to livestock;
- "Evaluate periodically their handling methods to ensure they minimize excitement, discomfort, or accidental injury and, except for establishments