

May 04, 2009

U.S. government joins Humane Society in slaughterhouse suit

The federal government said Friday it is intervening in the Humane Society of the United States' lawsuit against Chino-based Westland/Hallmark Meat Co., a Southern California slaughterhouse whose workers were caught on videotape abusing cattle, leading to the nation's biggest beef recall last year.

The lawsuit claims the slaughterhouse, at one time the second largest supplier of ground beef to the National School Lunch Program, fraudulently claimed that all cattle slaughtered at the plant were handled humanely. Undercover video released by the Humane Society showed workers dragging cows too sick or injured to stand with chains and shocking them with electric prods. The video led to the February 2008 recall of 143 million pounds of beef out of fear downer cattle, which pose a greater risk of illnesses such as mad cow disease, entered the food supply. The slaughterhouse closed after the recall.

The government plans to file an amended lawsuit in the case.