

United States Senate

HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
SUITE 112
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0505
(202) 224-3553
<http://boxer.senate.gov/contact>

January 30, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Schafer:

I write to bring to your attention a report released today by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) that details a number of possible federal law violations at the Hallmark Meat Packing Company, a cattle processing plant in Chino, California. Using undercover video surveillance, HSUS documented illegal animal handling practices that include the use of electric cattle prods and the use of forklifts and high-velocity water sprays to get "downed" cattle on their feet for inspection.

These practices are not only inhumane, but can also cause food borne illnesses that can endanger public health. According to USDA, downed cattle are 58 times more likely to carry mad cow disease than other cattle. Downed cattle also are more likely to carry other food-borne illnesses like E. coli and Salmonella, which kill hundreds of Americans every year.

The videotape is even more concerning in light of the fact that meat processed from this facility is being used in school lunch programs and in programs for needy families and the elderly. Infants, children and the elderly are more likely to experience severe illness and hospitalization from E. coli and Salmonella than the rest of the population.

Despite USDA regulations that prohibit downed cattle from entering the food supply, a loophole in the administration of this rule has allowed some downed cattle to be slaughtered for food. The actions taken by the slaughterhouse employees in the video to get downed cattle on their feet for inspection highlight the need to close that loophole.

As a result of the HSUS footage, I call on your agency to immediately investigate possible legal violations at the Hallmark Meat Packing Company in Chino, California, and to take further appropriate actions if it is discovered that federal law was violated. I also call on you to take steps to prohibit all downed animals from entering the food supply to protect public health.

Sincerely,


Barbara Boxer
United States Senator