Mr. Chairman, my name is Janet Riley and I am senior vice president at the American Meat Institute, the nation’s oldest and largest association representing the U.S. meat packing industry. Since 1991, I have had the honor of leading U.S. meat packing industry’s animal welfare programs and watching what has been at some points evolution and at others, a revolution. I appreciate the opportunity to testify for this committee about one of the most important aspects of my industry’s business: how we care for animals in our plants.

Our industry is unique because we must comply at all times with the Humane Slaughter Act, which is enforced by federal inspectors who are in our packing plants continuously. No other sector of animal agriculture has this level of regulatory oversight. But it is important to note that our industry seeks not just to meet federal humane slaughter requirements – we seek to exceed them.

Optimal welfare is ethically appropriate and good for livestock. But it also creates safer workplaces, better morale among employees and higher quality products.

Our industry took four key steps that have changed the way we handle our animals and improved animal welfare in measurable ways. These four steps include formation of a partnership with leading animal welfare expert Dr. Temple Grandin in 1991; launching the first industry specific animal welfare audit in 1997; developing training initiatives beginning in 1999 to encourage continuous improvement and finally, making animal welfare a non-competitive issue in our industry in 2002. I’d like to touch on each of those developments now.

In 1991, Dr. Grandin, now the subject of books and television programs, was relatively new to animal welfare. As a result of her lifelong battle to emerge from autism, she had developed a special appreciation for the way animals think visually and for the things that can be overwhelming to animals from a sensory perspective. The parallels between autism and animal behavior are striking. As we came to know Dr. Grandin, we came to appreciate the unique perspective she offered. We were blessed to have such a remarkable person take an interest in our industry and work with us in a cooperative way.
Looking back, it is clear that she earned the trust of our companies because she did not speak from an ivory tower. She offered practical, applied ideas about how to enhance welfare by working with – and not against – an animal’s natural tendencies. For example, she recommended using serpentine chutes that leveraged an animal’s natural curiosity to see what is around a corner to encourage them to move forward. This reduced the need for aggressive driving and electric prod use.

She taught us how animals see and said that by entering their flight zones at the proper point or by using something visual like a stick with a flag or grocery pack attached to end, we could prompt animals to move forward with minimal excitement. She also taught us to minimize distractions that can frighten livestock. By trying to look at our plants as an animal would, we now understand how to use lighting, air flow and certain color paints, we can help livestock remain calm, which is more humane and which also enhances the quality of the meat they yield. She and others now in the field have shown convincingly that physiology and economics work together when it comes to welfare. Treating animals in an optimal way is not just the right thing from an ethical perspective, it is the right thing economically.

These practices were detailed in our first 1991 Recommended Animal Handling Guidelines for Meat Packers, which she authored for us.

In 1996, after Dr. Grandin audited U.S. meat packing plants, she concluded that animal welfare in meat packing plants could be evaluated objectively. She argued that by developing measurable criteria and auditing regularly, we could monitor welfare in our plants and strive for continuous improvement.

Our Animal Welfare Committee endorsed this idea and in 1997, we released our first animal welfare audit document which we called Good Management Practices for Animal Handling and Stunning. We began counting:

- Slips and falls by livestock
- How often they vocalize
- How frequently we used electric prods
- How accurately we stun
- Whether any willful acts of abuse were observed
- And how effectively our livestock are made insensible during the slaughter process.

Dr. Grandin argued that you manage what you measure. The act of counting and measuring with regularity ensures that when a deviation occurs, a plant can explore and rectify the cause. For example, if suddenly livestock are slipping more than they have in the past, it may suggest that the floor may need to be re-grooved. If stunning accuracy declines, it may signal the need for equipment maintenance or for retraining of the stunner operator.

By 1999, major customers like McDonald’s, Wendy’s and Burger King were requiring the use of this audit as requirement for doing business. Our audit is used around the world and by certification groups like Certified Humane and Free Farmed. It also is the basis for efforts by Humane Society International’s training efforts in Central America. We are proud that this document has become so widely respected and utilized.
Also in 1999, we launched a conference to train our members in the principles of this audit. We worried about whether people would register and attend. But they did and each year more come. In March, 300 members of our industry attended two days of training in Kansas City. Our conference was the first of its kind and today remains the largest.

It is gratifying to see people who work in livestock pens and animal handling areas of a plant have the opportunity to come together to learn, to ask questions and to exchange information. Perhaps most importantly, during these two days, our plant employees learn from Dr. Grandin’s colorful style of training and they are encouraged to ask questions of her and of their peers and other academics, who co-present with her. Through this conference, we have sought to professionalize the role of the animal handler and to emphasize the significance of the jobs these employees do.

Even more recently, in 2002, our Board affirmed a motion by the Animal Welfare Committee to make animal welfare a non-competitive issue. In doing so, our members now openly share ideas with one another to enhance welfare.

This motion was the outgrowth of a gutsy step by Odom’s Tennessee Pride Sausage Company in Nashville, which invited the entire committee into their plant with Dr. Grandin. After we toured the plant, Dr. Grandin offered her comments and the committee had the opportunity to engage in open and honest discussion that benefited everyone.

At the conclusion of the meeting, we realized that this sort of exchange needed to be encouraged – it could not end with that plant tour. And this is why today, our committee visits a plant every August and tours it together with Dr. Grandin. We consider our animal welfare programs dynamic. We seek to share new ideas as they are uncovered.

As a result of this non-competitive philosophy, if a member has an animal handling challenge, he or she can contact AMI and we will facilitate dialogue with other members with similar operations. In some cases, members have traveled to competitors’ plants to learn from their experience. All of our ideas, our efforts, materials and our guidelines may be found on www.animalhandling.org. The entire site is public and the guidelines are free. This is yet another extension of our non-competitive philosophy on animal welfare.

My years in this area have shown me that people are a critical factor in animal welfare. Often, we read in this newspaper that groups are arguing for one system over another. The animal welfare debate is cast in black and white terms with one system being good and another being bad. But I have learned that systems can be managed well and they can be managed poorly. A small, low-tech plant with well-trained people can achieve the same kind of outcomes as a larger, high-tech plant. It takes management commitment and continuous monitoring. What matters most is the outcome and that is why we focus so heavily on achieving measurable outcomes.

In summary, the change that I have witnessed in 16 years is truly remarkable. It is also measurable. Data collected by Dr. Grandin show that performance on our audit points throughout our industry has improved substantially over the last decade.
Our industry’s comprehensive animal welfare efforts come as a surprise to many. But I’m pleased to say that they are second nature to us. There is no doubt, that ten years ago, the thought of counting moos in a meat packing plant raised some eyebrows. But now, we don’t let a week go by without it. Dr. Grandin has provided inspiration and motivation. And our members have provided the commitment to make what were once her theories a reality. Indeed, she acknowledges our partnership in her recent best-selling book *Animals in Translation*.

Certainly, there is a small percentage of people who believe that eating meat is immoral. Those who hold that view are unlikely to be satisfied with our industry’s efforts. But for the more than 95 percent of Americas who do eat meat and poultry, I believe that our efforts in this area will reassure them of our commitment to ensuring that livestock from which their meat products are derived are handled in an optimal and humane way while they are in our care.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this important case study in animal welfare to this committee.

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