



**Testimony
Of
President J. Patrick Boyle
American Meat Institute**

**“After the Beef Recall: Exploring Greater Transparency in the Meat
Industry”**

**Domestic Policy Subcommittee
Oversight and Government Reform Committee
Thursday, April 17, 2008
2154 Rayburn HOB
1:00 P.M.**

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee on the subject of transparency in the U.S. meat industry. And I'm honored to testify along with two of the American Meat Institute's members: Dr. Temple Grandin from Colorado State University and the American Humane Association, represented by Dr. John McGlone.

Clearly, our industry has received much focus since late January, when an under cover video depicting inhumane practices in a meat plant was released by an animal rights group. We were shocked and appalled by what we saw. Our industry has an extremely proactive record in this area. Since 1991, we have had a very active partnership with Dr. Grandin. She wrote the first industry-specific animal welfare guidelines at our request in 1991. In 1997, we embraced her idea that animal welfare could be measured objectively and asked her to write an audit program for us. Again, it was another first for animal agriculture. Our members began self-audit programs and third party audits soon followed. The industry we know is one that recognizes both the ethical responsibility and the benefits of humane handling.

It is important to step back and recognize that the meat industry is an industry unlike any other in the United States. We process live animals into wholesome meat products and we do it under the continuous oversight of federal inspectors who are in our plants during every minute of operation. No other industry besides the meat, poultry and egg industries operate in this fashion. These inspectors are empowered to take action any time they identify a deficiency or the slightest lack of compliance. A review of federal records will show that they actively use their authority.

For more than 100 years, we've operated in this manner. It's a level of scrutiny that other industries can't imagine. And if you step back to consider that other industries like healthcare facilities, restaurants and child care centers don't have this kind of oversight and are inspected only annually, it is truly remarkable that our federal government places as much emphasis on meat inspection as it does.

I was asked to speak to this committee about the issue of transparency in the meat industry. I am eager to explore this topic in its broadest sense.

In some respects our industry is among the most transparent in the United States. While our walls are not transparent, federal inspectors function as the eyes and ears of the public. Records generated by these inspectors are public documents and accessible to media, policymakers and consumers.

Certainly, our plants do host visitors under controlled circumstances. Customers tour our plants as do foreign delegations, lawmakers and other policy makers and a host of auditors who monitor our performance as a condition of business with many customers. But when we permit access, our first concerns are bio-security, food safety, worker safety and animal welfare.

Controlling access is essential to preventing the introduction of contagious animal diseases like avian influenza and foot-and-mouth disease. Controlling access also prevents the introduction of bacteria, pathogens, and even physical hazards into the products we produce.

Visitors who do enter our plants are required to wear a host of safety gear to protect them. They also wear clothing to protect our products, like hairnets, beard covers, boots and gloves. Jewelry must be removed and they must indicate whether they've been to foreign countries or to other plants or livestock operations within a defined time period.

We don't place restrictions on visitors to be difficult. We do it to protect livestock, our employees, the meat supply and in turn the American public.

Our experience and knowledge about animal behavior also tell us that visitors can actually cause animal welfare problems. Our goal is to ensure that livestock remain calm and unstressed. Unfamiliar visitors moving in live animal areas can actually stress livestock or make them unwilling to move forward. This is another good reason to maintain a secure, controlled and quiet environment.

We've heard many suggestions over the last several months about the role that cameras or live video feeds may play.

Many of our members do use cameras in their plants to monitor internal practices. Some members use a system where video feeds are transmitted by live remote to an auditing company. These cameras can serve as a valuable business tool. Because all plants are not alike, however, cameras have varying degrees of usefulness. A plant that processes only a handful of cattle a day – and there are plants like this – might view camera differently than a plant that processes 5,000 head a day.

In our view, it is essential that information about the role that cameras may play be made available to members. That is why the topic has been on the agenda of our annual convention and exposition and our annual Animal Welfare Conference. But cameras are not a panacea and their usefulness must be determined on a plant by plant basis to be implemented as a business tool.

Some have suggested that live video feeds from inside plants should be streamed to the internet. I cannot help but see the irony in that suggestion. Why should the most regulated and inspected industry whose legions of federal inspectors act as a proxy for the American public be compelled to broadcast its business to the world? For those who believe this idea has merit, I say

why stop there? Why not hospitals, nursing homes, child care centers, restaurant kitchens, auto plants and operating rooms?

We also must remember that today, only ten percent of Americans live in rural areas and only two percent of Americans live on farms. A member of the public with no knowledge of livestock or meat production would have no frame of reference in viewing and evaluating what we do in our plants. They would be as qualified to make a judgment as I would be if I were asked to critique an open heart surgery.

Indeed, I'm not worried about the public seeing something "wrong" in our plants. I am worried about an untrained eye seeing something right and misunderstand it because of their lack of exposure to animal agriculture

I will concede that the undercover video from a Chino, California plant has left a lasting imprint in the minds of those who viewed it. In the interest of showing people what is truly typical, today we are making available a new video with footage from plants in our industry, interviews with Dr. Grandin and interviews with the leaders of the AMI Animal Welfare Committee. The video is available on You Tube and may be accessed from the home page of our dedicated web site www.animalhandling.org. We plan to provide more videos like this one to give America a more accurate frame of reference.

We hope that our new section on YouTube will reassure the media, policy makers and consumers and help us tell our story in a way that is meaningful. We do have an excellent story to tell.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before this committee to share the first chapter in what will be an ongoing dialogue with the millions of Americans who place their faith in us and our products.