

# *How Can We Improve Communication with the Public?*

*Temple Grandin*

The only way to regain credibility is to be completely transparent. Recently I received an email from a person who had assumed that all the undercover videos shown on activist websites showed normal practices. She thought that it was normal on pig farms to beat up and abuse animals. She was surprised when she saw a video that showed normal practices. Last year I received a phone call from a freshman English major who believed that everything on animal activist websites was true. Until recently, activist websites were always in the first page of Google results.

Fortunately, within the last year, the animal industry has started to open up the door electronically. In 2012, Beef Plant Video Tour with Temple Grandin was posted on YouTube by the American Meat Institute. It shows the entire process of live animal handling and stunning. On activist websites, it is common to see videos showing leg reflexes in properly stunned insensible animals and imply to viewers that the animals are still conscious. In the video, I explain that the kicking back leg of a hanging stunned animal is reflexes. The head can be removed and the legs will still kick. The video has had about 90% positive response and on March 1<sup>st</sup> it had 39,000 views. During the last year, I have seen other videos posted which show normal practices on farms. This is a step in the right direction, but the industry needs to do even more to show how things work.

## **CONSUMERS DON'T LIKE SURPRISES**

The pink slime debacle blew up in the industry's face because consumers don't like surprises. Twenty years ago, you could get away with not having lean finely textured beef on the label. With today's consumers, ALL ingredients must be listed. The industry reacted very poorly and not fast enough. Most people consider waste of food a sin. I calculated that if pink slime was removed from the food supply it would translate into everyday throwing away, one truckload of live cattle at each large plant. The entire agriculture industry must face the fact that there are

no secrets anymore. People want to know what is in their food, and we need to show it to them.

## **MEAT RESEARCH HARD TO ACCESS**

When I was asked to present this paper, I asked if it would be available for open access to consumers using Google. I was told that it would be for members only. My response is that the proceedings of the Reciprocal Meat Conference should be on an open website. We need to get scientific information out to the public. The Journal of Animal Science has a good policy and articles become open access after one year. New rules will be going into effect to make all U.S. government funded research that is published in the scientific literature open access after one year.

One of the easiest ways to communicate is to let Google in. I surfed around on the internet to determine which meat industry magazines I could find articles in when I typed titles of articles into Google. Many of the producer's magazines I could access them. Unfortunately, in most of the meat magazines, the articles do not come up when I type titles into Google. This means that Google has been locked out. The magazines do this because their advertisers want to know how many qualified readers who might buy equipment visit the site. The policy may be good for meat magazine advertisers but it is BAD for industry communication with the public. The activist publications are fully open to the Google search engine. This results in all the activist literature appearing in top search results when the public goes online. One solution for the meat magazines is to open up their articles for keyword searches after six months. Many of the articles that appear in various meat industry publications would educate consumer. We have got to stop preaching to the choir. When I write an article for *Beef Magazine*, which is a magazine for cattle ranchers and feedlot operators, the articles can be accessed with keyword searches. For most meat magazines Google keyword searches are locked out.

## **PUBLIC NOT AWARE OF IMPROVEMENTS**

The good news is that there have been so many improvements in meat plants but the public does not know about them. I have been in the meat industry for 40 years and

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*Temple Grandin, Ph.D.*  
Dept. of Animal Science  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1171  
Cheryl.miller@colostate.edu

I have observed the improvements over the years. In the 1980's and the early 1990's, the plants were a mess. In 1999, the first big changes in animal welfare started with the audits conducted by the restaurant companies. I trained auditors for McDonalds, Wendys and Burger King to conduct the AMI audit. The restaurant audits brought about great improvements. Within the last few years, the USDA has become much more strict. Humane handling is light years ahead of where it was 15 years ago. Unfortunately the public will read the new websites were USDA regulatory actions are posted and they may think things are worse. If those websites had existed 20 years ago, the regulatory actions would have been three to five times more frequent. It is time to make more videos. How about videos on how equipment is cleaned with lots of foam? I have talked to people who thought meat plants were cleaned once a week.

### **PRACTICES THAT NEED CHANGING**

There are practices on how animals are raised that will need to be changed. The pork industry needs to phase out gestation stalls. There are also concerns about beta agonists. At the plants I have observed lame cattle, severely heat stressed cattle, and cattle that were stiff and did not want to move. All these animals were young feed-lot cattle. Some of these problems are probably due to

poor feed mixing so some animals get a triple dose of beta agonist. When I observed these problems, the effects were variable. Some animals were severely affected and the rest were normal. This is not acceptable.

Another area that needs improvement is the treatment of cull dairy cows. Some members of the dairy industry are still clueless and they treat cull dairy cows as rubbish instead of as food.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

We have to look at everything we do and ask ourselves "would you show this to your out of town wedding guests?" A well-run slaughter plant passes the test. These are practices on the farm that will not pass the test. I have been criticized for using the word slaughter instead of harvest. When I was in Hollywood, the entertainment press was fine with the word slaughter. They were curious and wanted to know how things worked. If you want a softer word, then words like processing, meat plant, beef plant or pork plant can be used. I have used meat plant in many of my publications. You must remember when the general public surfs the internet, they will not be using harvest as a keyword. I am proud of the improvements I have helped to implement in the industry. I want to get the public to know about them. It's time to open the doors electronically and get the video cameras rolling.