



The Agricultural Marketing Service Animal Handling and Welfare Red Meat Purchase Requirements: Design, Implementation, and Findings

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Objectives

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) sought to develop and implement improved animal handling and welfare (AHW) requirements for vendors who sell red meat to AMS for distribution through Federal nutrition assistance programs, including the National School Lunch Program.

Materials and Methods

In 2012, AMS undertook a meta-analysis of publicly available AHW requirements, including those enshrined in Federal law, those used as industry best practices, and those required by large volume purchasers. The AMS modeled its AHW requirements for red meat vendors on the *Recommended Animal Handling and Audit Guide* established by the AMI Foundation. The AMS included a zero tolerance for missed stuns and for animals regaining sensibility following stunning, as observed during AMS AHW audits. The AMS also included a requirement that any stunning-related regulatory enforcement action taken by the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) at an AMS vendor facility triggers a for-cause AHW audit by AMS. Trained AMS auditors performed audits at all facilities that produced beef, pork, lamb, and bison for Federal nutrition assistance programs. Data were collated and analyzed in Microsoft Excel.

Results

From October 2013 through December 2015, AMS performed 62 audits at beef harvest facilities, 31 audits at pork harvest facilities, 6 audits at lamb harvest facilities, and 3 audits at bison harvest facilities. Nine of the audits were triggered by FSIS regulatory enforcement actions. Auditors observed stunning of 7,908 head of cattle, 3,900 head of swine, 1,300 head of lamb, and 52 head of bison. Three missed stuns were observed and no animals were observed regaining sensibility following stunning. Data from all AMS AHW audits are available via the AMS web site (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/resources/ahw>).

Conclusion

The AMS AHW requirements are effective. Establishments providing beef, pork, lamb, and bison to AMS for distribution through Federal nutrition assistance programs have robust AHW plans and are reliably efficient in performing the stunning process. Sharing results publicly fosters strong relationships across the stakeholder spectrum and helps ensure the credibility of the overall purchase program.