

## **Humanely Speaking: Blunt Trauma**

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**Canadian Farm Animal Care Trust (CanFACT)**

Every year we kill over 700 million animals and birds – to eat. We kill another estimated 15 million animals that are condemned as unfit for human consumption. Most of the meat is diverted to pet food. Our ‘companions’ eat them. How good are these numbers? As good as they can be since not all animal slaughter houses are licensed and not all authorities report publicly. But we know that the federal government licenses the large plants – those which export their products either intra-provincially or abroad. The Federal Department of Agriculture and Food reported that these plants killed 650 million animals and birds last year.

In addition, it is estimated that slaughter houses licensed by provincial governments killed another 65 million.

Additionally, there is an unknown number of unlicensed plants. It is believed there may be hundreds, even thousands, of these illegal operations.

Finally, thousands of private individuals also kill animals and birds for their own consumption. Consequently, the final total is not known, but 800 million may well be a conservative figure.

In addition to the animals and birds killed for food, there is an unknown number of animals and birds killed on the farms where they were raised because they are sick or otherwise unfit to be transported to a slaughter house; or because they were deemed unworthy of the cost of transportation.

This ‘slaughter of innocents’ is accepted, condoned and encouraged by all levels of governments as necessary to feed an ever growing human population, and to maintain an important section of the agriculture community.

The Canadian public has always been glad to believe that fish do not feel pain. With this assurance, we do not express any concern for the billions of fish we kill, generally by suffocation, every year. And if anyone thinks that number is diminishing because of reduced commercial fishing on both coasts, they should remember the incredible growth on both coasts, of fish farms.

This is the reality. And no amount of hand wringing, moaning, groaning or gnashing of teeth will alter this harsh, blood-thirsty fact of life. A growing number of Canadians are rejecting meat and fish and becoming vegetarians. In doing so, they are no longer part of the problem and their conscience is eased. Somewhat!

But one over-riding, unavoidable, inevitable end faces these millions of farm animals. In the end they will all be killed. But how? Until 1960, there was no legislation in Canada controlling the way in which food animals could be killed. But in that year, the Government of Canada introduced the first “Humane Slaughter Act.” The new Act required that all animals (excluding birds) killed in federally licensed slaughter houses be rendered unconscious (and therefore insensitive to pain) by an “approved humane method” before being “hoisted and/or bled.” At first poultry were exempt, but later, when an acceptable system for rendering poultry was developed, the Act was extended to cover poultry as well. The only exception was, and still is, Kosher (Jewish) Ritual Slaughter. The Act applies only to plants licensed by the federal government. Some provincial governments, but not all of them, have introduced similar legislation. The main consolation of meat eaters is the belief that the animals are all killed humanely. Indeed, if any federal or provincial Minister of Agriculture is asked, they will, without hesitation, assure the enquirer that the animals are killed humanely. And, in theory, they are. But sadly, the reality is that they are not – at least not all of them.

Without going into technical details, it is sufficient to say that the most common way to render an animal unconscious, prior to 1960, was by a blow to the head with a hammer or other blunt instrument. This method was commonly used to beat cattle into unconsciousness, when they could be hoisted into the air by a back leg and then bled by cutting their throat. But not all cattle were properly stunned and instead were hoisted whilst still conscious or regained consciousness after being hoisted.

Pigs were not even given this consideration. Instead, they were shackled by the leg whilst fully conscious and hoisted to an overhead moving belt which dragged them, kicking and squealing, to an operator who stuck the point of a knife into their carotid artery. The moving belt transported the bleeding pig into a scalding tank to de-hair the pig. Some pigs recovered in the tank and attempted to swim out of the tank.

Poultry are much smaller and relatively easier to handle. They were hung by their necks on a moving overhead belt and, again, 'stuck'. Some were 'stuck' using an electric knife. The theory was that the current would render the bird unconscious. However tests showed that the shock merely paralyzed the bird which meant the bird was fully conscious.

But those were the 'bad old days'. Or were they? It is probably true to say that in the federally and provincially licensed plants the majority of the animals slaughtered in those plants are, in fact, rendered unconscious prior to being hoisted and bled by "an approved method."

In the case of cattle, they are shot with a captive bolt gun. Horses are routinely shot with a rifle. Pigs are rendered unconscious in an electric current applied to the brain by applying two electrodes, one to each side of the head simultaneously. Poultry are hooked to a moving overhead track by the leg. The head of the bird passes through an electric bath which renders the bird unconscious. At least in theory.

But these are the 'good' plants which are regulated by law. But is the law uniformly and carefully enforced? Recent revelations by an independent expert retained by Agriculture Canada to carry out an "audit" (or inspection) of a small number of federally licensed plants, reported that she had observed some incidents which were, clearly, a breach of the law. Dr. Temple Grandin, an internationally recognized authority on farm animal behavior, reported that she had witnessed a number of cattle hoisted fully conscious and struggling whilst a male employee attempted to cut their throats. The official excuse? "He was upset by being watched by Dr. Grandin!" One can only imagine how he might abuse the animal if he wasn't being 'observed!' This could, indeed, be an isolated incident (which could quickly be solved by either firing the guilty party or at least, transferring him to a job which doesn't expose live animals to his tender mercy), but the obvious question to be asked is whether this was, in fact, an isolated incident; or was it, instead, typical of the level of behavior in slaughter houses.

In recent months, the number of inspectors in slaughter houses has been reduced. In addition, the whole system of inspection and supervision of the animal's progress through the slaughter process has been changed. The priority has shifted to give more attention to the safety of the meat for human consumption, than to the humane treatment of the animals. How else can the incident of an employee actually hoisting cattle whilst fully conscious be explained. Where was the supervisor?

Recent enquiries by CanFACT have revealed that millions of rabbits are killed in Canada for human consumption. The majority are killed or rendered unconscious by "blunt trauma" – in other words they are clubbed or hammered.

There is every reason to believe that millions of small animals, such as lambs, goats and calves are still being hammered to death.

It has been 43 years since the Humane Slaughter Act was introduced into law. In spite of this law and similar provincial legislation, it is clear we cannot claim that our meat comes to the table without suffering pain and distress.

It is time for an independent public enquiry into every aspect of the way hundreds of millions of animals die each year in the process of feeding Canadians.

But to avoid the enquiry being seen simply as a “whitewash” or, worse still, actually being one, the investigation must be carried out by thoroughly knowledgeable, experienced and completely independent individuals who are at “arms length” from government and the meat industry. And their report must be made public. And if, like me, you are a meat eater, you have a duty and a responsibility to persuade your MP and MPP to take the appropriate actions. If you don't, you should become a vegetarian.