

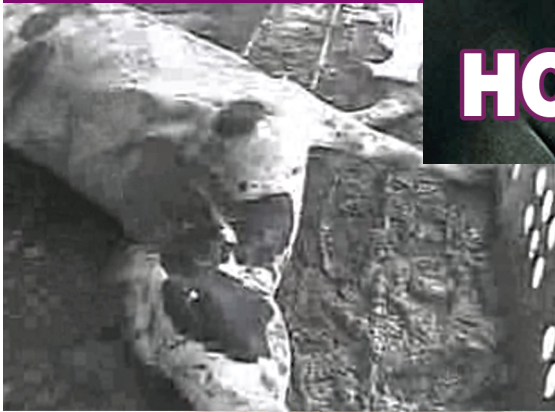


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## HORTON HEARS...A COW!



 HALLMARK MEAT PACK



<http://tinyurl.com/yul2lw>



If we can't feel or see this imaginary stuff, no problem exists, Ms. Kangaroo huffs. But Horton, an elephant of great girth, was certain he heard cries from a teeny tiny earth.

*"Then finally, at last! Their voices were heard!  
They've proved they are here, no matter how small!"*

**And so little Whos of Whoville were saved by someone who believed in their right to remain. Their world on a dust speck was clearly in tatters, till Horton proclaimed: "EVERY VOICE MATTERS!"**

In Theodor Geisel's (a.k.a. Dr. Seuss) fabled tale, Horton the elephant hears pleas for help on a dust speck lodged in a clover. Hollywood's version of "Horton Hears A Who" paints an animated universe strangely like our own. No one in the jungle trusts the goofy pachyderm because, as Kangaroo warns: You cannot believe in something you can't see or touch.

Horton defies the code of the jungle to speak for creatures without a voice. This reminded me of animals in society. Specifically, my mind drifted to the cows.

As a rule, we don't hear much about cows. California's Milk Advisory Board assures us they are "Happy Cows," who "make a ton of other delicious dairy products!"

In a Horton-esque twist, cows became news with the release of a video from Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) in February 2008. The footage, shot over six weeks in 2007, shows how Westland/Hallmark Meat Company mistreated sick cows trucked in from industrialized dairies. After HSUS gave their video to the San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office, two workers at the Chino, Calif.-based plant were booked on possibly the nation's first felony charges for animal abuse at a slaughterhouse. So far, none of their superiors face prosecution.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture banned "downed cattle" from entry into the human food chain after the 2003 discovery of a Washington state downer with mad cow disease. Still, close to a half million infirm cows are annually dragged to slaughter, a JAVMA report predicts. Each nonambulatory animal is worth about \$30 in hamburger revenue. Big dairy operations account for 90-95% of downed cows, asserts Temple Grandin, an animal science professor at Colorado State University who considers 75% of cases preventable with humane care.

In the HSUS video, Hallmark employees electrically shock the heads, necks, spines and re-ctums of disabled cows. Former pen manager Daniel Navarro paddles a listless cow in the face and eye. The men hoist cows on forklift prongs and roll their giant bodies over pavement. They fire concentrated water jets into the cows' nostrils and throats.

## I'D NEVER HEARD A COW SCREAM LIKE THAT BEFORE.

"One cow is down on the truck when she arrives," the investigator recounts. "Workers shock her from behind, but she's too weak to stand. A chain is attached to her leg and she's dragged with a forklift. As she's pushed along concrete, you can see it causes her so much pain... A worker drives over her leg and face with the wheels of the forklift. I'd never heard a cow scream like that before."

By itself, Hallmark footage is unremarkable. The breaking news is that it took a guy with a pen camera fastened to his shirt button to reveal that downers — those most likely to test positive for bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or mad cow disease — easily become dinner. Among 15 confirmed BSE cases in North America, at least 12 were downers. Impaired cows also harbor more E. coli and Salmonella contamination.

The investigator toiled 12-hour days, at \$8 an hour, herding cows down chutes to the kill floor. In an anonymous phone interview, he told the Los Angeles Times he observed "brutalization of animals too weak or sick to walk to slaughter. It was so in-your-face. As cows are making their final steps, there's no USDA personnel objecting to this behavior."

His findings prompted a recall of 143,383,823 pounds of beef on 2/7/08. Hallmark, a partner of Westland Meat, lost its USDA contract to furnish beef for America's School Lunch Program. Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) suspended its audits, in effect closing the plant. The Office of the Inspector General subpoenaed proof for the Justice Department to pursue criminal prosecution.

It was a whistle-blower's triumph, as if Horton himself had roused sleeping bureaucrats: "**The video, the cows, the people...how true! Hence forth, Kangaroo will protect every creature with you!**" But Capitol Hill isn't Seuss-world and former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Edward Schafer is no Kangaroo. In Congressional Hearings spurred by the Hallmark fiasco, Schafer said it's okay for downer cattle to enter the food supply from time to time. He asked the Senate Appropriations Agriculture subcommittee to strike down a legally binding ban on slaughter of downers.

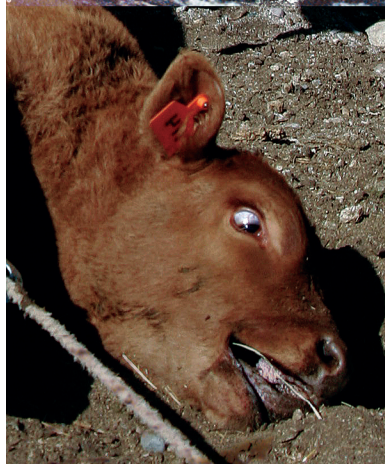
## WHY DO WE NEED A DOWNER LAW? OUR "RULE" ALREADY SERVES JUSTICE FOR ALL!

The Downed Animal Protection Act sets an enforceable industry-wide ban on the transport, marketing and slaughter of all downed animals (not just cows). The Farm Animal Stewardship Purchasing Act requires government-contracted producers to comply with basic humane policies, such as merciful euthanasia for downers. Neither bill has seen much movement beyond committee hearings. Secretary Schafer believes a downer law is unnecessary. The U.S. Senate lets politics trump mercy, again rejecting a measure to ban non-ambulatory cattle in Sept. 2008.

Perhaps, but it's a gamble. Nonprofit humane groups — not federal watchdogs — expose most animal welfare and food security breaches. Westland/Hallmark is not a first-time offender. In 1993, the animal protection organization Farm Sanctuary filmed Hallmark workers shoving cows with forklifts. Two California groups uncovered 11 verified instances of abuse at Hallmark between 1996



Farm Sanctuary photos: 1, 3, and pig



and 2004. USDA cited Hallmark for violations such as "too much electric prodding" in 2005. After the video story broke, USDA found Hallmark had killed cows forced upright for pre-slaughter inspection since February 2006.

This all happened under USDA radar, despite the agency's 2003 injunction on downed cows for human consumption. In 2005 another mad cow emerged in Texas, further validating a link between downers and BSE. Even so, the Bush admin diluted USDA's rule in 2007 to let downers, in some instances, pass into the food chain.

**CRONYISM, USDA-STYLE.** Today, there is still no downer law. USDA's weak rule doesn't prevent slaughter of immobilized cows and excludes pigs, goats, sheep, and other animals altogether. A ban on chains, forklifts,

trucks, shock prods and other violent means to move animals is largely ignored. Just 7,600 inspectors monitor 6,200 slaughter-plants across the nation.

Evaluating animals often entails "peering down from catwalks at hundreds of animals, looking for telltale signs such as droopy ears, stumbling gait, facial paralysis," the Associated Press disclosed in Feb. 08. Inspections are so irregular, companies clean up their act beforehand.

Past USDA official Mike Taylor says the agency is locked in an old-fashioned mindset, "that doesn't fill the bill on either food safety or animal welfare." Indeed, FSIS fails to screen sick animals, according to an Office of the Inspector General audit that predates the Hallmark debacle. "It's the inevitable outcome of a system in which animal abuse and health concerns are predictable by-products of following the prime directive — maximizing profit — in a context of inadequate oversight," Anna Lappé writes in *Largest Beef Recall, Ever. Now, Real Change?* for the Huffington Post.

Big Meat pretty much regulates itself, with deep political pockets. In 2006, Lappé notes, the livestock trade lavished \$4.5 million on lobbyists. National Cattlemen's Beef Association PAC contributed nearly a half million dollars for a total livestock industry gift that capped \$5 million. Agribusiness has donated nearly \$300 million to Republicans from 1990-2008, Center For Responsive Politics reports.

Policymakers and cattlemen are virtually indistinguishable, Lappé points out. USDA's Communications Director was public relations director for National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). Chief of Staff for previous USDA Secretary Ann Veneman was Cattlemen's director of legislative affairs. USDA's Deputy Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs boasts 15 years experience with the cattle guys. And so on. Critics question USDA's role as promoter/regulator. Some want the agency to stop inspecting the same meat it advertises.

**A HEFTY PRICE TAG.** As experts weigh the merits of pre-slaughter inspection versus total downer exclusion, they forget the animal on the ground. USDA Secretary Schafer says rules are clear: "If one goes down, you call the veterinarian to make a judgment."

Meanwhile the "one who goes down" languishes in manure, sometimes for days, as she awaits inspection. From an industry standpoint, "image will improve, both domestically and in export markets...if downers are prevented and when a nonambulatory condition does occur, put down on the farm," writes foodborne-illness litigator Bill Marler in *The Raw Economics Driving the Use of Downers*.

**From a social perspective, one wonders if cheap meat is really worth its cost in inhumanity. The cows found their Horton in a Humane Society investigator. Now, can anyone else hear them?**

**FOOTNOTE, 3/14/09:** President Barack Obama took office and promptly solidified the USDA's rule with his signature to permanently ban the slaughter of downed cows and close a loophole that left some downers unprotected. While this ban only applies to cows and is still an administrative rule, not a law, it is a positive step beyond the previous administration's inertia.



**No dying animal should be rammed upright with tractors and forklifts...hauled, shocked, pounded... so meatmakers can eke about \$30 out of her tortured body.**