Walking the Talk: Taking OIE Guidelines into Turkish Slaughterhouses

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Abstract

Eyes on Animals and Animal Welfare Foundation focus their efforts on field work and direct dialogue with industry. We send, regularly and unannounced, our international team of veterinarians and ethologists directly into slaughterhouses in OIE-member countries to check on conditions of the animals. Recently we have concentrated on a dozen slaughterhouses in an OIE-member country, Turkey.

Most of their slaughterhouses have serious welfare problems. They often still use the trip-floor box, where cattle are forced to fall down in order for one leg to be chained, and then hoisted alive. This is an unacceptably cruel practice that has continued despite OIE standards strictly forbidding its use. Knives sawed to cut the throat are often too short, causing additional suffering and prolonging bleed-out time. We provide friendly but firm advice and counselling in the Turkish language.

Employees are motivated to carry out improvements on the spot with us. Furthermore, we use the OIE educational slaughter-video and discuss steps towards better compliance with OIE standards during the training courses we have given in Istanbul and Ankara and during our inspections of the slaughterhouses. We have created a Turkish/English Slaughter Modernization brochure and website illustrating practical solutions.

Introduction

Often the biggest obstacles to improving animal-slaughter conditions is that information about better animal handling techniques and more humane equipment do not trickle down to the actual people in direct contact with the animals. Welfare guidelines and scientific knowledge are written down on paper and often remain there or are not translated into the local language. People working in slaughterhouses and local religious figures need a helping hand to understand the information and realize why it is important to change old habits and how to do it. Our teams do exactly this.

Common Problems in Turkish Slaughterhouses

- Slippery floors in lairages and raceways.
- Raceways with open sides and lack of anti-mounting racks.
- Common use of trip-floor box. Animals shackled and hoisted alive.
- Cruel unloading of injured animals with no ability to stun them first.

Our efforts to improve conditions

- Motivating employees to keep floors clean and non-slip.
- Installing solid panels along raceways.
- Stimulating local manufacturers to replace trip-floor boxes with more humane systems.
- Introducing the use of stunning equipment.
- Lubricating fear-inducing squeaky doors.

Conclusion

Being sentient with complex emotions and needs means that people have a moral obligation to treat animals with respect and care. As long as humans continue to use farm animals for food and clothing, the least that must be done is to limit pain and fear as much as possible. This is easier said than done, as knowledge on the ground about how and why is often lacking. Eyes on Animals and Animal Welfare Foundation try to bridge this gap via communication and direct action.

After two years of working in Turkey we are starting to see a positive change towards animal welfare during slaughter:

- Two of the largest manufacturing companies of slaughter equipment have now stopped producing trip-floor boxes.
- One slaughterhouse now stuns cattle prior to hoisting and cutting.
- Four have improved their raceway design and restraint technique.
- Over 200 Turkish veterinarians, government officials, meat distributors and slaughterhouse workers have participated in the two 2-day training courses we have organized in Istanbul and Ankara.

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