REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL WELFARE

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The Committee met on Wednesday, October 29th, 2008, at the Sheraton Greensboro Hotel at Four Seasons Greensboro, North Carolina. Chair Amelita Facchiano called the meeting to order at 8:00 am with 44 committee members and at least 31 guests in attendance. Chair Facchiano reviewed the activities of the Committee during and following the 2007 Annual Meeting. The mission statement of the Committee was acknowledged in her opening remarks. The three agenda items suggested most by the members for this session were race horse issues, existing programs with farm animal standards, and handling welfare issues at the state level.

Discussion also included the issues of quorum status and proxy voting, both of which are to be addressed by the Board of Directors to provide clear guidance in the future. Members were asked to provide suggestions for future meeting agenda topics either directly to the Chair or Vice-Chairs or by written comment on the attendance sheets being circulated through the room, and announced that the 113th Annual Meeting would be October 8-14, 2009, at the Town and Country San Diego, California. Facchiano then reviewed the action taken at the previous meeting before introducing the first speaker.

Ms. Cathy Liss, Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), spoke on the issue of humane slaughter. She noted that with meat recalls due to bacterial contamination and the horrific handling and slaughtering of downer cows making headlines throughout this past year, consumers are increasingly aware of some of the problems occurring behind the slaughterhouse doors. The AWI has released a 150-page report authored by Dena Jones analyzing humane slaughter enforcement at slaughter plants. Crimes Without Consequences: The Enforcement of Humane Slaughter Laws in the United States reveals an ongoing lack of sound enforcement at plants around the U.S. Drawing from over 1,000 documents obtained from sources including 60 public records requests to federal and state agriculture departments from 2002 to 2007, the book exposes both the lack of compliance by plants and the lack of sound enforcement at plants by departments of agriculture.

Only 42 enforcement actions beyond issuances of deficiency reports for non-compliances with the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act were taken in the U.S. between 2002 and 2005. Whistleblower accounts
and undercover documentation suggest the majority of crimes are not observed or recognized by inspection personnel, not reported through the proper channels, or the appropriate remedial measures are not being taken. AWI is calling on Congress to: 1) extend the federal slaughter law to include poultry; 2) assign a minimum of 50 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety Inspection Service inspectors the sole task of ensuring the humane handling, stunning and slaughter of animals; 3) reject the notion that sound enforcement can be achieved by use of cameras in lieu of inspectors; and 4) abandon the notion that industry self-regulation is adequate. Discussion by a member followed on the need for USDA to address these challenges at slaughter facilities.

Dr. Gail Golab, Animal Welfare Division, American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), presented AVMA’s animal welfare activities report. AVMA reported on a number of activities this year in fulfillment of its strategic goal to be an advocate for and an authoritative science-based resource on animal welfare. Multiple substantive policy revisions were adopted (e.g., castration and dehorning of cattle, trapping and steel-jawed leghold traps, disabled livestock) as were several new policies (e.g., elephant guides and tethers, humane transport of equines, veal calf housing). Federal legislative activities focused on responses to proposals in Congress addressing horse slaughter, horse transport, and private ownership of nonhuman primates by unlicensed individuals, as well as seeking legislation to address unwanted horses and to amend the humane slaughter act to include all species slaughtered for commercial use. At the state level, while acknowledging that a specific response to Proposition 2 was within the purview of the California Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), the AVMA expressed its desire for a more comprehensive approach to addressing behavioral needs in housing for laying hens, veal calves and gestating sows. On the international level, AVMA representatives attended the 2nd Global Animal Welfare Conference sponsored by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) in Cairo, Egypt. The focus was implementation of OIE animal care standards. Other activities included continued development of backgrounders (referenced literature reviews on issues of interest), revised and expanded animal welfare pages on the AVMA Website, production of a new brochure on animal welfare decision-making, and educational initiatives directed toward graduate veterinarians and veterinary students. Notable projects moving forward in 2009 include reconvening the Panel on Euthanasia and an AVMA-Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) Animal Welfare Symposium focusing on animal welfare education, research, and advocacy.

Dr. Rachel Cezar, Animal Care (AC), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), presented the overview of the Horse Protection program including the current specific definitions utilized in the Horse Protection Act (1970). The details of the USDA enforcement program to eliminate the inhumane treatment (action devices, prohibitive substances, shoeing, etc.) of horses through the act of soring were shown in a video and also discussed. Specifically, challenges and statistics for this past year with violations of the Horse Protection Act were highlighted, with 506 shows inspected and 629 violations in 2007. Also, the new technology of thermography and foreign substance testing being utilized during the inspection procedure was described along with their application during inspections.

Dr. Robert Gibbens, AC-APHIS, updated the Committee on the animal care program activities. There are 9,800 active facilities in the U.S. that are regulated by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). Missouri is the state with the most facilities, mainly dog dealers. There were 100 inspectors performing 16,000 inspections in 2008. The Animal Care Information System is being developed for the on-line licensing, registrations, and inspections reports, and the system should be functioning in the near future. The Office of Inspector General (OIG) just completed the audit of commercial dog breeders with the final report expected in 2009. Another OIG audit is expected in 2009 for exhibitors, including large cats. The newest docket proposed is for development of contingency plans to provide care for animals under the AWA in the event of disaster or emergency. The 2008 Farm Bill had impacts on the importation of large dogs, increased the maximum civil penalty for violation of the AWA, and called for a study on the use of dogs and cats for federally funded research. Animal Care also had activities on pet sheltering and evacuation policies for disasters. The announcement has been disseminated on the development of the Animal Welfare Center for the informational support of AWA and the Horse Protection Act.

Ms. Deb Reinhart, Gold Star Farms, briefed the Committee on the National Dairy Animal Well-being Initiative (NDAWI) which is a dairy producer lead effort to build consumer trust and confidence in the dairy industries with a focused commitment to animal well-being. The NDAWI consists of broad principles and
guidelines that any dairy well-being program should include to meet their ethical obligation of providing for the well-being of dairy animals. This is not another on-farm animal well-being program. Many of the co-operatives, associations and independent companies have already established or are in the process of establishing well-being programs. The uniform national dairy animal well-being principles and guidelines will help validate the strength of individual on-farm well-being programs.

This coalition is a broad base group of volunteers from across the country representing every facet of the dairy industry. It includes producers, processors, coops, allied industry, academics, associations and others. Much of the work done by the initiative has been done through volunteers. The Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin provided the initial funding to get the initiative off the ground. Other industry stakeholders have provided funding to help launch the initiative publicly. The principles and guidelines were released in 2007 at World Dairy Expo and were available for industry comment and feedback. A final version was unveiled at the 2008 World Dairy Expo. The NDAWI is an on-going continuous improvement process to provide assurance to national stakeholders that the entire industry is meeting their obligation of providing appropriate care for dairy animals by having a uniform umbrella of national well-being principles and guidelines. There will be third-party verification of the individual programs in the future.

Ms. Nancy Robinson, Livestock Marketing Association (LMA), presented LMA's new Livestock Auction Market Guide to Animal Handling and Employee Handling (The Guide), an educational approach to enhancing livestock handling at member auction markets throughout the U.S. Robinson gave a brief outline of LMA’s new guide, as well as the voluntary assessment tool for market animal handling practices that will be offered to their 180 member markets. The Guide is a comprehensive education and training tool for market operators and their employees on the proper handling of livestock at auction markets. The Guide focuses on eight areas of primary interest in providing proper care and handling of livestock at auction market facilities. Those primary areas of interests covered in The Guide are: 1) the role and responsibilities of the market owner/manager in following proper animal handling procedures and protecting livestock, employees and others from injury; 2) livestock working surfaces and working with gates; 3) managing risks at the market to avoid animals becoming non-ambulatory; 4) the proper handling of animals that become injured or disabled at market facilities; 5) the handling of animals that arrive non-ambulatory; 6) proper movement of non-ambulatory animals; 7) safe and responsible euthanasia of various species of livestock; and 8) development of animal handling guidelines for individual market facilities and self-assessment of market handling practices. Robinson also discussed the initiation of a new LMA sponsored voluntary assessment of their member markets’ animal handling practices. Under this program, market owners/managers may request an assessment of their facilities by LMA field representatives to determine if proper animal handling practices are being followed by their employees as established by The Guide.

In advance of the Committee’s meeting, all Committee members who have quality assurance program resources on animal care (animal care standards, or animal care guidelines) were invited to bring handout materials for distribution at a display table in the meeting room. The Committee took a break to allow members and guests to peruse the materials, pick up copies, and discuss the information contained within these publications. Many different species were represented and all available hand-out materials were disseminated among the interested Committee members.

Dr. Carolyn Stull, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California-Davis, presented an overview of a recent extension workshop for the dairy industry on technology transfer that benefits the non-ambulatory bovine. Even though only about two percent of dairy animals become non-ambulatory each year, the public has become aware of the handling and treatment of these animals through news and other media stories. The workshop introduced an educational approach to improving the welfare of non-ambulatory cattle. The lecture portion of the workshop focused on the causes, care, treatment, and handling of the non-ambulatory cattle at commercial facilities and markets, along with the indications and appropriate methods of euthanasia. The hands-on laboratory gave participants the opportunity to interact with the utilization of the large animal sling, which is a rapid and practical on-farm method to lift non-ambulatory cattle. The suitability of floatation therapy following lifting was discussed for the treatment of non-ambulatory cows. Participants also experienced the discharging of the penetrating captive bolt device as an appropriate euthanasia method. Dairy management was encouraged to work with their veterinarians to develop welfare and handling plans for non-ambulatory cattle. The workshop was a proactive and
practical approach to improving welfare of non-ambulatory cattle, and is expected to be repeated in the near future for various facets of the industry in California.

Dr. Charles D. Vail, Littleton Equine Medical Center, Littleton, Colorado, spoke on the topic of the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) White Paper on the practice of soring of show horses. A video developed by three Girl Scouts on the practice of soring in Tennessee Walking Horses was shown to the Committee, and is available on the web. The AAEP paper is a classic white paper developed by committee that focused on soring. Soring is purposely and deliberately practiced to exaggerate the gait of the Tennessee Walking Horse and causes pain in their front legs. Vail gave the substance for a resolution which calls for the elimination of soring, with USDA continuing their diligence in enforcing the Horse Protection Act.

Dr. Ernie Zirkle, retired New Jersey State Veterinarian, described the lessons learned from New Jersey on the creation of animal care standards for animals raised for food and fiber. In 1996, the New Jersey legislature mandated that standards be developed for humane care, treatment, raising, keeping, marketing and sales of domestic animals. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture declared that they would develop standards below which conditions would be clearly inhumane. The standards would not be developed as optimum standards or best management practices, but could be used as guidelines in animal cruelty investigations. Delayed for several years by lack of funding appropriations, the standards were finalized and published in May 2003 and adopted in June 2004. A public hearing elicited fierce debate with 100 people testifying both for and against the standards. Additionally, 6,500 written comments were received, mostly negative, from almost all states as well as many foreign countries. Minor amendments were made and the final version was published June 5, 2005. On June 25, 2005 an appeal was filed by a coalition of plaintiffs including The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), Farm Sanctuary, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Animal Welfare Institute, Animal Welfare Advocacy, Center for Food Safety, and New Jersey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, as well as others. The case was heard before the New Jersey Superior Court in December 2006 which rendered an opinion upholding the Department of Agriculture in February 2007. The animal rightists appealed to the Supreme Court and in a decision published July 30, 2008 the courts ruled in favor of the Department with the exception of tail docking in cattle. Additionally, the courts charged that the Department keep current with scientific data regarding humane livestock production.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture defended their obligation to support the ability of animal agriculture to continue the practices of husbandry taught by land grant colleges across the country. Collectively, there has been no national initiative on the part of animal agriculture to scientifically and systematically counter the emotional appeal of the animal rights movement. The Committee on Animal Welfare needs to reach out to organizations that have similar missions and who could benefit from a synergistic relationship. Examples are the National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) and the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA) which deals not only with livestock but with pets, wildlife, and exotics. While New Jersey agriculture has unique pressures, both from population density and a highly educated, liberal citizenry, the challenges New Jersey faced five years ago have surfaced across the country. Zirkle recommended that those committed to the future of animal agriculture must diligently and collectively launch an aggressive public defense with common sense and factual information. Zirkle gave an overview of the impacts of closing the slaughterhouses for equines in the U.S. including the increase in the number of facilities for slaughtering U.S. horses in Canada and Mexico; the number of unwanted horses is increasing the U.S. and a solution should be developed by working together with all concerned to reverse the unintended consequences of the closures of the slaughter facilities in the U.S.

Committee Business:
The business meeting followed the last presentation. Five resolutions were considered. The first Resolution discussed was to support the AAEP call for the elimination of the abusive practice of soring and requests that the USDA-APHIS-AC, in cooperation with industry, to continue their vigilant monitoring of the Horse Protection Act of 1970. The Resolution passed unanimously.

The second proposed Resolution banned the transport of horses in double-deck trailers was amended; the amended version passed. An amended Resolution on the consistency in guidelines and applications for large scale euthanasia also passed the Committee with a unanimous vote.
Proposed Resolutions which were submitted but failed for further action were on the USAHA proposed response to World Organization of Animal Health (OIE)’s definition of welfare and the call for USAHA to contact the Commission and request an amended report that incorporates the technical committees’ peer-reviewed findings.