

July 21, 2004

William C. Smith, Assistant Administrator
Office of Field Operations
Food Safety Inspection Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.
Whitten Building, Rm. 344E
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Smith:

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is the world's largest animal rights organization, with more than 800,000 members and supporters dedicated to ending animal suffering. We are writing with disturbing evidence of a potential violation of the Poultry Products Inspection Act at a Pilgrim's Pride slaughterhouse located in Moorefield, W. Va. (establishment number P810).

Our investigation into this slaughterhouse reveals that fully conscious chickens are violently stomped upon, kicked, slammed into the floors and walls, and tortured by employees in a variety of other ways on a routine basis. In one incident on February 27, 2004, a worker stepped on and apparently killed a chicken who had been thrown to the floor of the room in which live birds are shackled prior to slaughter. The enclosed video shows that the carcass remained motionless on the same floor where dead and dying birds are piled up throughout the day. The floor is typically covered with cigarette butts, chicken blood, feces, and other bodily fluids. Approximately 57 minutes later, a worker picked up the bird and hung him or her on the line for entry into the food supply. You can view the entire uninterrupted sequence in the enclosed video.

The Poultry Products Inspection Regulations (9 CFR 381.65(a)) requires that "[o]perations and procedures involving the processing, other handling, or storing of any poultry product must be strictly in accord with clean and sanitary practices and must be conducted in a manner that will result in sanitary processing, proper inspection, and the production of poultry and poultry products that are not adulterated." Furthermore, according to § 381.1(b)(v) ("Definitions"), the term "adulterated" applies to "the product of any poultry which has died otherwise than by slaughter."

While we realize that there is still, inexplicably, no federal protection for birds from inhumane slaughter in this country, the act described above is clearly a violation of food-safety regulations. The *deliberate* hanging of a seemingly dead chicken who had been marinating in filth and blood for nearly an hour should be of great concern to your office. We also have many other examples of live birds



PETA

PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

501 FRONT ST.
NORFOLK, VA 23510
757-622-PETA
757-622-0457 (FAX)

PETA.org
info@peta.org

AN INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATION DEDICATED
TO PROTECTING
THE RIGHTS OF ALL ANIMALS

being thrown or falling to the floor of the “hanging pen” and later being hung on the line (available upon request).

We ask that you use your department’s authority to punish this act to the full extent of the law. Otherwise, Pilgrim’s Pride will continue to behave as if it has no responsibility to meet even the minimal federal regulations regarding poultry slaughter or concern itself with the health of consumers. We already know that the company has an inhumane culture, and we have asked the local prosecutor to pursue criminal prosecution for cruelty to animals (see enclosed).

Should you need further information, please let us know. I can be reached at 757-622-7382, extension 8013; by fax at 757-628-0784; or by e-mail at CemA@peta.org. We look forward to your prompt response and thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cem Akin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cem" being more prominent than the last name "Akin".

Cem Akin, Research Associate

cc: The Honorable Ann M. Veneman, Secretary of Agriculture
Dr. Barbara J. Masters, Acting Administrator, FSIS 202-205-0158 (fax)

enclosure: Video titled “Pilgrim’s Pride Slaughterhouse Footage”
Letter from PETA addressed to Prosecuting Attorney Lucas See