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Undercover Video Shows Pig Farm Employees Allegedly Abusing Pigs

By Marla Cichowski

CHICAGO — A disturbing video released exclusively to Fox News by the animal rights group Mercy for Animals (MFA) shows a string of alleged abuses at one of the nation's largest pig farms, including footage of employees picking up baby pigs and tossing them like footballs.

Additional scenes from the video show injured pigs going uncared for, pregnant hogs being kept in very small pens, with several portions of the video so disturbing that Fox News will not show.

MFA is now taking on America's farming industry, hoping its latest undercover investigation will help create new federal and state laws to ensure better treatment for farm animals before they are slaughtered.

The national animal rights group's investigation involves a large pig-breeding farm in central Pennsylvania owned by Country View Family Farms (CVFF). An MFA employee who applied for a job at the farm wore a hidden camera to record a shocking 12-minute video while he worked inside the pig barns for three months earlier this year.

The video starts by showing CVFF employees picking up baby pigs by their ears and hind legs and throwing them between employees.

Another disturbing section of the video shows baby pigs being euthanized in carbon dioxide gas chambers. Although this euthanasia practice is standard throughout the pork industry, MFA claims the gassing procedure at this particular farm did not work properly and caused baby pigs to suffer unnecessarily.

MFA also claims adult female pigs were kept in gestation crates that are too small, and sick pigs were left untreated for weeks and did not receive proper medical care.

"There are no federal laws that protect animals while they are on the farm, and most state anti-cruelty statutes exempt farm animals," Daniel Hauff, MFA Director of Investigations, told Fox News.

"What we documented is standard and largely accepted by the pork industry and as a civilized society it's our moral obligation to make sure animals don't suffer needless cruelty. It's important we look at these animals the same way we look at dogs and cats because there is no difference. They feel the same pain, the same joy our beloved animals at home do," Hauff said.

Fox News Channel visited the Country View Family Farm in Fannettsburg, Penn., where CVFF veterinarian, Dr. Jessica Clark, and communications manager Eric Haman sat down with us to watch the MFA video for the first time.

"There are some things in this video that I can't and won't defend. The mishandling of animals I can't defend, it's unacceptable," Haman told Fox News. "But there are others that could be seen out of context and I can't really understand what's going on."

Country View Family Farms, a division of Hatfield Quality Meats, is one of the largest pork producers in Pennsylvania and operates more than 100 pig farms across Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana.

While watching the MFA video, Haman says he felt anger and disappointment. He maintains CVFF takes animal welfare very seriously, requiring all employees to undergo rigorous training and sign code of conduct letters agreeing to proper handling of the animals.

"We are more strict on ourselves than any government regulation could be. We hold ourselves very highly accountable," Haman told Fox News. "As a business, it makes no sense to not take the best care of our animals that we can — No. 1 from an ethical standpoint, but secondly from a business sense."

Clark expressed similar disappointment in what she saw on the video, but defended the company. "CVFF is dedicated to taking care of the animals and we'll immediately investigate what is on this tape and take any necessary actions."

Two days after the interview at the CVFF Fannettsburg farm, Haman told Fox News that the barn manager at the farm had been "immediately relieved of her responsibilities and a new barn manager assumed responsibility."

The mishandling of pigs was an issue discovered at the Fannettsburg farm back in July, according to Haman. Since then, CVFF has re-trained all employees to "reinsure every team member at every farm was perfectly clear on our animal handling code of conduct."

Currently there is no federal law requiring the U.S. Department of Agriculture to inspect farms where animals are raised for slaughter.

Most states, including Pennsylvania, exempt farm animals from state anti-cruelty laws that apply to domestic animals. In 2007, the National Pork Board, which monitors the pork industry, launched its Pork Quality Assurance Plus program, focusing on animal welfare training and encouraging pork producers to hire third-party auditors to inspect their farms.

"You have someone come out and go through your facility and give you suggestions on how to change and improve things," Iowa pork producer Dave Moody told Fox News. "It's not just a self-check the box and you pass the certification sort of deal. There is some definite education to it,"

Daniel Hauff says MFA will keep fighting for stronger state and federal animal welfare laws while continuing to pressure grocery store chains to boycott companies that treat farm animals in ways MFA considers unethical.

But animal producing farms, including CVFF, realize they have become targets for groups like MFA, which promotes a strict vegetarian diet.

The president of the American Association of Swine Veterinarians, Dr. Butch Baker, who also watched the MFA video, says it is upsetting to see animal rights organizations try to destroy America's farmers.

"They (MFA) would like to put all those people (farmers) out of business and out of work," Baker told Fox News. "I have no patience for anyone who abuses animals or no tolerance and I don't think anyone should, but these films . . . really are an attack on the rural lifestyle of America.

"People in rural communities depend on farms and farming for their livelihood. If you let an extremist group run the industry that's just as bad as letting the people who didn't care about the animals at all run the industry," he said.

Fox News correspondent Steve Brown contributed to this report.

Notes

¹<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,575305,00.html>