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Investigation of Canada's Largest Turkey Slaughterhouse (Eastern Canada's only Turkey Slaughterhouse) Coopérative fédérée de Québec / Unidindon Inc. / Olymel In St-Jean Baptiste, Quebec May, 2007 External Report

Location:

Plant Address

Coopérative fédérée de Québec / Unidindon Inc. / Olymel
3380 rue Principale
St-Jean Baptiste, Quebec J0L 2B0

Mailing Address

Coopérative fédérée de Québec / Unidindon Inc. / Olymel
C.P. 430
St-Louis de Gonzague, Quebec J0L 2B0

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Inspector: (450) 467-4402

Dates visited:

02/05/07
30/05/07
31/05/07

1. Facility Information:

Species: Turkeys. 180,000 turkeys are killed each week at this plant.

Companies Supplied with Turkey meat from this plant:

Harveys Restaurants / Cara Operations Ltd.

6303 Airport Road
Mississauga, Ontario L4V 1R8
Ph: (905) 405-6771
Fax: (905) 405-6667

Subway Restaurants / Doctor's Associates Inc.

325 Bic Drive
Milford, CT 06461 – 3059 USA
Ph: (203) 877-4281
Fax: (203) 876-6674

Companies responsible for Transport of Turkeys to Slaughterhouse:

Transport GND Inc.

3380 rue Principale
St-Jean Baptiste, QC J0L 2B0
Ph: (450) 464-8452



2. Observations:

02/05/07

On this day there were five trailers fully loaded with turkeys under the tarpred area. We talked to the man responsible for maintaining the area. He showed us the water spray system he installed to help cool the waiting birds. It was loud under the tarp from a wall of fans blowing on the birds. The worker told us each trailer held 900 turkeys with two per crate, but it was obvious that at least three of the five trailers held many more than that; some held up to five birds per crate. These cages were so overloaded that birds had to struggle to keep their beaks unencumbered enough to breath. Many weren't able to and died. We estimated that approximately one bird was dead per crate in four of the five trailers. The trailers had been waiting different lengths of time. The condition of the birds deteriorated as our inspection continued down the line, with those that had been waiting longest containing more dead and dying than those that had just arrived. The worker told us the plant prefers to have at least five full trailers of birds ready and waiting so that when the slaughter line starts it will not have to stop to wait for more birds to come in. Thus, many of these trailers had been here well over two hours. We were told that 1,900 turkeys were killed at this plant per hour – the equivalent of two trailer loads of birds. The worker told us that five staff work in the unloading area, unloading the cages from the trucks, throwing them onto a conveyor belt that transports the crates to the live hangers. The live hangers then remove the birds from the crates and hang them on metal leg shackles, upside down by their feet while fully conscious.

The worker told us the meat from these birds is sold to Subway and Harvey's restaurants.

Overcrowded conditions

To add to the overcrowded conditions, many of the birds that died did so in a prone position, meaning that their bodies stretched diagonally across the crate, trapping the survivors into one small back corner. These birds had difficulty breathing and were, in many cases, completely immobilized.

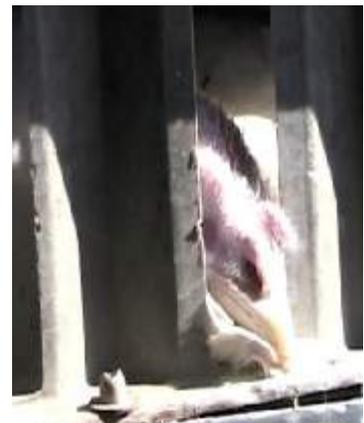
Many birds were forced to have parts of their bodies or heads protruding from the crates – we saw wings, beaks, and limbs forced out. This puts the birds' at risk of fractures during high speeds of travel or movement and shifting of the other birds.



Close-up of bird in corner



Beak and toe of bird forced out of crate



Face of turkey pushed into a corner



Face of turkey pushed into side of crate



Close-up of bird forced against side



Feathers, body parts protruding from crate

02/05/07 cont'd:

Dead birds

There was a surprisingly high rate of mortality and morbidity. In the overcrowded cages, at least one bird per cage was dead. Many appeared to be dying.



Dead turkey, beak down into bottom of crate



Dead prone turkey – at least 3 others loaded into this crate

Physical condition of the turkeys:

Many had crippled, deformed feet and legs or were missing parts of their toes from “toe trimming” that had been done on them as poults. Some were missing entire digits. Many birds were completely non-ambulatory and many were missing large areas of feathers from their bodies. All were debeaked.



Crippled toes and feet



Debeaked and exhausted

Behaviour of the Turkeys:

Most were showing signs of overheating by panting. Almost all were exhausted. Some appeared to be dying.



Panting



Dying birds



02/05/07 cont'd:

Trailer conditions

The insides of the crates were caked with waste and feathers from the birds. The longer the birds had been onboard, the worse the conditions.



30/05/07

Although on the same day of the week (Wednesday) and at approximately the same time as we last visited, the plant was very quiet on this day. Only one half-full trailer of turkeys was on the property (the remaining birds were in the front half of the trailer).

When the garage door opened briefly, we were able to see into the area where the birds were removed from the crates and live-hung. The turkeys were being unloaded and hung upside down by their feet onto a conveyor system that circled around the right side of the room. Although we knew turkeys were hung in this manner, to see the size of the bird being hung by his or her feet was startling. Some of these birds weigh 28 kg (60 lbs) when slaughtered. This is an enormous amount of stress on their leg and hip joints when suspended by their feet. The birds are completely conscious when hung in this manner.

31/05/07

We arrived in the morning and were again surprised to see no trailers waiting. Four trailers were under the tarpred area but most were empty. One trailer had turkeys on the bottom two levels. We noted all the trailers were owned by *Transport GND* – the company contracted to transport the birds.

When the garage door opened on this morning we were unable to see the live birds as empty crates were piled in front of the area where the birds were hung.

3. Violations:

Federal Health of Animals Act

Part XII Transportation of Sick, Pregnant and Unfit Animals

138. (2) *"No person shall load or cause to be loaded...and no one shall transport or cause to be transported an animal (a) that by reason of infirmity, illness, injury, fatigue or any other cause cannot be transported without undue suffering during the expected journey."*

138. (2.1) *"For the purpose of paragraph (2)(a), a non-ambulatory animal is an animal that cannot be transported without undue suffering during the expected journey."*

138. (4) *"No railway company or motor carrier shall continue to transport an animal that is injured or becomes ill or otherwise unfit for transport during a journey beyond the nearest suitable place at which it can receive proper care and attention."*

A high percentage of the turkeys we saw had broken limbs, limb deformities, were missing digits or had broken wings. Some of these injuries were likely sustained during the loading process. The loading and transportation of these injured birds is in direct violation of this regulation.

Part XII Loading and Unloading Equipment

139. (2) *"No person shall load or unload, or cause to be loaded or unloaded, an animal in a way likely to cause injury or undue suffering to it."*

The nature of how turkeys are loaded causes undue suffering. The birds are grabbed by their feet, held upside down then thrown into a crate. Another bird is quickly thrown in after it. Often the birds are tossed on top of one another without a chance to right themselves first. This surely causes injury and undue suffering to the birds.

Part XII Prohibition of Overcrowding

140. (1) *"No person shall load or cause to be loaded any animal in any railway car, motor vehicle, aircraft, vessel, crate or container if, by so loading, that railway car...is crowded to such an extent as to be likely to cause injury or undue suffering to the animal therein."*

140. (2) *"No person shall transport or cause to be transported any animal in any railway car, motor vehicle, aircraft, vessel, crate or container that is crowded to such an extent as to be likely to cause injury or undue suffering to any animal therein."*

While the crates were only designed to hold up to two turkeys each, many had up to five birds within them. This overcrowding, which Transport GND is responsible for, is in direct violation of this regulation.

Meat Inspection Act – PART III

Examination, Inspection, Humane Treatment and Slaughter, Packaging and Labelling

62. (1) *"No food animal shall be handled in a manner that subjects the animal to avoidable distress or avoidable pain."*

The practice of hanging live, fully conscious turkeys by their feet exposes the birds to avoidable distress and pain, especially for those that are heavier thus increasing the stress on their leg and hip joints and bones.

80. *"No equipment or instrument for restraining, slaughtering or rendering unconscious any food animal shall be used by any person for those purposes (a) unless the person is, by reason of the person's competence and physical condition, able to do so without subjecting the animal to avoidable stress or avoidable pain; or (b) where the condition of the equipment or instrument or the manner in which or the circumstances under which the equipment or instrument is used might subject the animal to avoidable distress or avoidable pain."*

The design of the metal shackles used to suspend the turkeys causes avoidable distress and pain.

4. Conclusion:

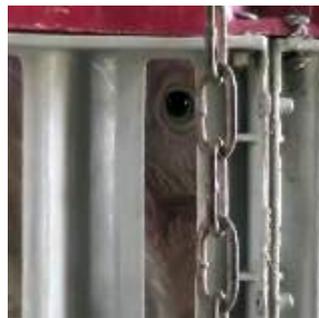
Our investigation uncovered serious violations of the federal ***Health of Animals Act***:

1. Turkeys are being loaded onto transport trailers in such a way as to cause injuries and broken bones, thus violating **Part 139(2), Loading and Unloading Equipment**.
2. The transportation of these then injured and sometimes non-ambulatory animals exposes them to undue suffering, thus violating **Part 138, Transportation of Sick, Pregnant and Unfit Animals (a) that by reason of infirmity, illness, injury, fatigue or any other cause cannot be transported without undue suffering during the expected journey**.
3. The birds were overcrowded to such an extent that high mortality resulted. The temperature on this day was moderate (16°C). We expect the mortality rate would have been much greater had the temperature been higher. **This is a violation of Part 140(1) and (2), Prohibition of Overcrowding**.

The investigation also uncovered a violation of the ***Meat Inspection Act***:

The shackling upside down of fully conscious birds of this size constitutes unnecessary suffering. Some of these birds weigh up to 60 lbs (10-15 lbs more than lambs). This causes pain and suffering especially to those with pre-existing broken or injured limbs, and is a violation of **62(1) and (80)**.

- 1.



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