No Need to Be Boxed in: Group Pens and Grain for Veal Calves

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Comment

tion there are evidenced feelings of ambigui-
yty, as well as ambivalence toward the nat-
ural order and the role of human-
kind in it. Some have found in the scrip-
tural material the impetus for great acts
of kindness, others the justification for
unreadable cruelty. This might have
been expected, considering the ways biblical
materials have been used in other con-
troversies throughout history. In truth,
the bible represents an open tradition: it

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of kindness, others the justification for
ploitation and compulsive manipulation
nature was known in biblical times. Ex-

unspeakable cruelty. This might have been
"God's
measure to his own goodness, in which
his creatures participate by reason of
their existence and in the measure of it.
That measure is now large, now small.

Only by the most heavy-handed and
insensitive treatment can the bibble be
used to support the view that the natural
world is "at our disposal." What place
and what value the animal world and
the rest of the created order have is in-
tricately bound to the question, "What
values do we have, and why?" H. Paul
Sanmtire (1970) has written, "Nothing
comparable to modern exploitation of
nature was known in biblical times. Ex-
plotation and compulsive manipulation
were simply not possible on so vast a
scale in pre-industrial, pre-technocratic
societies." This assessment remains true,
but needs to be tempered by archaeolo-
gical data which show that the critical
measure here was not humankind's intent,
but merely the state of its technology
and its numbers.
The ecological ills of the present
that are sometimes said to be the result
of biblical influence (especially the com-
mmand to "have dominion and subdue it")
are not at all a necessary outgrowth of
that statement, as I hope I have shown.
The Israelite tradition, at least, did not
evidence these sorts of sentiments. A
case can be made quite to the contrary.

The catastrophes of history by
which God punishes pride, it must
be observed, are the natural and in-
evitable consequence of men's ef-
tort to transcend their mortal and
secure existence and to establish a
security to which man has no right
(Niebuhr, 1941).

And finally, as Shakespeare comments:

If then the heavens do not their visi-
ble spirits
send quickly down to tame these
vile offences,
It will come.

Humanity must perforce prey on
itself,
Like monsters of the deep.

—King Lear, IV, ii.

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No Need to Be Boxed in: Group Pens and Grain
for Veal Calves

Michael S. Mosner

Background

My family has been in the whole-
sale veal business for 30 years. The basis
of this business has been various breeds
of female beef calves that are slaughtered
at less than 500 lb. These calves are al-
lowed to suck from cows and graze until
they are ready for market. Beef calves,
however, tend to vary in quality and quan-
tity depending on the time of the year
that they are purchased and raised. Gen-
erally, calves become scarce in the spring,
when feeders are buying calves to put
out on pasture. Then, in the summer and

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fall, large numbers of calves usually become available, thereby depressing prices. Again, in the winter, calves become scarcer and consequently more expensive.

In the early '70s, there was a chronic shortage of calves. However, feed was cheap (interest rates were, too), and feedlot operators were snatching up everything that moved for beef. As a result, my father, David Mosner, had some difficulty procuring calves for veal production. At that time, Dr. Gardner of Brigham Young University was experimenting with the use of a grain diet for calves raised for veal. He concluded that there was no difference in taste or tenderness between grain-fed and milk-fed veal. After learning about Gardner's work, my father suggested that I do some work on grain-fed calves while I was attending Cornell University. Dr. R.C. Warner of Cornell agreed to sponsor and supervise me in an independent research project on the economical feasibility of grain-supplemented rations for veal calves. I concluded from these initial studies that grain-fed veal could be raised economically. The only remaining hitch was to find a means to end up with a calf carcass pale enough to satisfy the current preferences of consumers.

However, after the huge grain sale to Russia in 1974, the cost of feed skyrocketed. Indeed, a worldwide food shortage ensued. As a result, feed costs became exorbitantly high, and feedlot operators stopped looking for calves. This slack in demand caused a decrease in the price of calves, and the necessity of feeding grain to calves for veal production was greatly diminished.

Upon graduation from Cornell, I jumped into raising milk-fed calves. Through-out the first 3 years, as a prime veal feeder, I continually experimented with different grain rations for calves. During most of 1980 and 1981, the price for finished milk-fed calves was quite low. Many growers were forced out of business. Also, skim milk and whey prices rose, thereby placing extra economic pressures on the grower. The high cost for prime veal fluctuated by as much as 86 cents per lb; there was no stability in the market. Then, in 1981, I began to raise only grain-fed calves, in order to circumvent the constraints of the traditional marketing channels.

Current Operation

At present, there are three types of veal. These include the beef-type calves (discussed above), baby "bob" calves, which are slaughtered immediately after birth, and milk-fed calves. The production costs entailed in raising prime veal are particularly high. The sophisticated systems necessary for strict climate control and expensive automatic feeding machines place the price of milk-fed veal beyond the reach of most consumers. In contrast, bob calves are relatively inexpensive, but they provide a poor meat-to-bone ratio to the packer and therefore represent poor utilization of live stock. As mentioned before, beef breeds tend to vary considerably in both quality and quantity throughout the year. Thus, grain-fed veal appeared to be a viable option for making consistently high-quality veal available to consumers at a reasonable price. Also, the calves would be blessed because of the favorable meat yields attainable from grain-fed veal. In our operation, calves are raised in group pens rather than in individual stalls. This allows the calves room to move around and to "socialize." This practice eliminates much of the stress put on the calves in crate systems. Furthermore, there is some iron content in the grain, the calves do not become as anemic as milk-fed calves. Anemia is a well-recognized stressor to calves, and a reduction in stress means that disease is less likely to develop. In addition, grain-fed veal provides better nutrition to the consumer, because of the additional iron in the meat. This decrease in anemia is accomplished while the low levels of fat and cholesterol for which veal is noted are retained. In essence, grain-fed veal constitutes a highly desirable commodity, since it can be produced inexpensive-ly, is a high-quality product, and is afford-able to the average consumer.

We are currently operating in a converted free-stall dairy barn. We have capacity for about 600 calves. (However, additional stock can also be penned outdoors.) We buy calves that have an initial weight between 150 and 175 lb for grain-feeding. However, sometimes economics may dictate that we buy baby calves—this in case, milk replacer is offered until weaning, which occurs at 6 weeks of age. Calves are housed inside the barn and sorted into pens in groups of 20. Each pen is 12 by 32 feet, thereby allowing each calf about 20 square feet. Calves are finished at 450-500 lb, live weight, and this increase in weight requires about 4 to 5 months. Straw and old hay are used as bedding. When older calves first come into the barn, they are given an initial check for general health and an injection of vitamins. The calves are offered hay and a commercial calf starter. After 3 weeks, the calves are switched to the finishing ration, which consists basically of corn, with a protein supplement and essential vitamins and minerals. Baby calves, after weaning, are switched from milk to calf starter and 15 lb water; after they have consumed about 100 lb of starter, they are switched to the finishing ration.

Perhaps the most important reason for this decline has been the high price of veal and the resulting substitution of other meats. Consumers are now buying more of the reasonably priced products, such as poultry and pork. Chicken, turkey, and pork cutlets are currently being featured in many supermarkets and restaurants. Not only are these meats less expensive than veal, but they taste good, too. In my opinion, unless the veal grower can find ways to cut the costs entailed in production, he will simply price himself out of business. I believe that grain-fed veal is the best economic alternative to all other types of veal, for many reasons. Grain-fed calves offer the consistent high quality that the beef breeds do not.
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Current Operation

At present, there are three types of veal. These include the beef-type calves discussed above, baby "bobby" calves, which are slaughtered immediately after birth, and milk-fed calves. The production costs entailed in raising prime veal are particularly high. The sophisticated systems necessary for strict climate control and expensive automatic feeding machines place the price of milk-fed veal beyond the reach of most consumers. In contrast, bob calves are relatively inexpensive, but they provide a poor meat-to-bone ratio to the packer and therefore represent poor utilization of live-stock. As mentioned before, beef breeds tend to vary considerably in both quality and quantity throughout the year. Thus, grain-fed veal appeared to be a viable option for making consistently high-quality veal available to consumers at a reasonable price. Also, packers would be pleased because of the favorable meat yields attainable from grain-fed veal. In our operation, calves are raised in group pens rather than in individual stalls. This allows the calves room to move around and to "socialize." This practice eliminates much of the stress put on the calves in crate systems. Further, because there is some iron content in the grain, the calves do not become as anemic as milk-fed calves. Anemia is a well-recognized stressor to calves, and a reduction in stress means that disease is less likely to develop. In addition, grain-fed veal provides better nutrition to the consumer, because of the additional iron in the meat. This decrease in anemia is accomplished while the low levels of fat and cholesterol for veal is noted as a plus. However, sometimes economics dictates that we buy baby calves—a case of low disposable income and a high-quality product, and is affordable to the average consumer.

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In the beginning, we used baby Holsteins in our operation. However, we have found that it is also economical to use other breeds, such as Hereford, Angus, and Charolais (purchased at 200-300 lb, live weight).

A salient advantage of this system is that labor costs per animal are substantially lower than with conventional milk replacer systems. Since the calves are not individually penned and food is consumed as needed, one man can take care of several times more calves. However, without individual pens, it is not as easy to assess how much a particular calf consumes or to discern illness. For these reasons, skilled management is a critical factor in this program, as in all group pen operations. Another advantage of the grain-fed program is that there are usually a wide variety of grain suppliers to choose from, in contrast to the small number of milk replacer sources.

My finished calves have been graded as choice veal and are distinguished by a light pink hue and excellent conformations. The major problem we have faced so far arises from the myth perpetuated by some feed companies—that veal must be white to be of premium quality. Consumers have been repeatedly told that "if it's not white, it's not veal." I believe that this is an obvious fallacy that must be countered by effective educational efforts.

The Future of the Veal Industry

Over the last decade, the per capita consumption of veal has steadily declined. Perhaps the most important reason for this decline has been the high price of veal, and the resulting substitution of other meats. Consumers are now buying more of the reasonably priced products, such as poultry and pork. Chicken, turkey, and pork cuts are currently being featured in many supermarkets and restaurants. Not only are these meats less expensive than veal, but they taste good, too. In my opinion, unless the veal grower can find ways to cut the costs entailed in production, he will simply price himself out of business. I believe that grain-fed veal is the best economic alternative to all other types of veal, for many reasons. Grain-fed calves offer the consistent high quality that the beef breeds do not.
not, the meat-to-bone yields that bob calves lack, and the relatively low price makes the product a nutritional and affordable choice for the consumer.

Introduction

The Animal Welfare Act is the only federal statute designed to protect animals used in laboratory research. Under this law, research facilities are required to register with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and to meet minimum standards of housing, care, and treatment for most warm-blooded animals. The Act is administered by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), an agency of the USDA. The Animal Welfare Act established by law

The human ethic that animals should be accorded the basic creature comforts of adequate housing, ample food and water, reasonable handling, decent sanitation, sufficient ventilation, shelter from extremes of weather and temperature, and adequate veterinary care, including the appropriate use of pain-killing drugs. [emphasis added]

The petitioner considers all provisions of the Animal Welfare Act important, but none more so than those that concern animals used in painful experimentation. The number of animals used in such procedures is great, and has increased over the years from 65,301 in 1974 to 122,656 in 1980, according to APHIS (1975, 1981) reports. (These figures are cited for comparative purposes only since their reliability is questionable.)

Since 1970, congress has required research facilities to show that during actual research and experimentation, pain-relieving drugs are used “appropriately” and in accordance with “professionally acceptable standards” of care. To this end, congress established the Research Facility Annual Reporting System.

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Reporting Requirements Under the Animal Welfare Act: Their Inadequacies and the Public’s Right to Know

M. Solomon

and

P. C. Lovenheim

Comment

[The Secretary of Agriculture] shall require, at least annually, every research facility to show that professionally acceptable standards governing the care, treatment, and use of animals, including appropriate use of anesthetic, analgesic, and tranquilizing drugs, during experimentation are being followed by the research facility during actual research or experimentation (7 USC 2143—emphasis added).

Under current regulations, research facilities must file an Annual Report with APHIS showing the number of types of animals used in “actual research, testing, or experimentation,” and indicating which tests involved “accompanying pain or distress to the animals.” In instances when animals were used in painful procedures but were given no pain-relieving drugs, the Annual Report must include “a brief statement explaining the reasons for the same” (9 CFR 2.28(a) (2)(4)).

The Reporting System, functioning properly, should provide APHIS with information sufficient to demonstrate that researchers are using pain-relieving drugs “appropriately” and in accordance with “professionally acceptable standards.” This was congress’ intent and the System is, in fact, the only means by which APHIS can obtain such information on a regular and cost-effective basis. Effective administration of the Reporting System, therefore, is crucial to enforcement of this most important provision of the Animal Welfare Act. We therefore undertook an analysis of the reports from 5,211 facilities for FY 1979.

We conclude from the analysis that the Reporting System, as presently administered, fails to achieve its primary statutory objective: it does not provide APHIS with information sufficient to demonstrate that researchers have used pain-relieving drugs “appropriately” and in accordance with “professionally acceptable standards.” The chief reasons for this failing are (1) regulations and guidelines do not define “pain” or “distress,” (2) regulations and guidelines do not adequately define “routine procedures,” and (3) regulations and guidelines do not require meaningful explanations for the withholding of pain-relieving drugs in procedures acknowledged to cause pain.

The Reporting System, as presently administered, for the same reasons, also fails to achieve a secondary— but nonetheless important— objective: it does not generate reliable and meaningful information to the public about the use of animals in research. When congress passed the Animal Welfare Act amendments in 1970, it declared that animals used in research “deserve the care and protection of a strong and enlightened public” (H. Rep. No. 91-1651, 91st Cong., reprinted in (1970) U.S. Code Cong. & Ad. News 5103, 5104—emphasis added). The analysis also revealed serious transcription errors, involving tens of thousands of animals, by APHIS staff.

Statement of the Problem

Current regulations and guidelines do not define “pain” or “distress.” Without such definitions, researchers appear to apply conflicting standards in interpreting these terms.

Current regulations require research facilities to report annually to APHIS on the use of animals in “actual research, testing, or experimentation,” and to indicate which tests involved “accompanying pain or distress to the animals” (9 CFR 2.28(a)). APHIS supplies researchers with a specific form for submitting the Annual Report (“Annual Report of Research Facility," VS Form 18-23) and has also issued instructions for completing the Report form (“Instructions for Submitting the Research Facility Annual Re-