

Calls For Quick Congressional Investigation

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Washington, DC— Today Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) was alarmed by yet another undercover investigation by the Human Society of the United States (HSUS) that exposed deplorable treatment of dairy cows at a New Mexico auction house. The cows sold at the auction yard were destined for slaughter and many were processed at the Palo Duro plant which is a top supplier of ground beef to the National School Lunch Program.

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"Earlier this year, we learned of the horrendous treatment of dairy cows at the Westland plant in California," DeFazio said. "Given the high profile nature of that investigation, and the subsequent criminal conviction of the plant manager from that facility, I am absolutely appalled that this continues to occur."

In North America, more than 80% of confirmed cases of mad cow disease – 13 out of 16 – are found in downer animals. Downed cattle should never enter the food supply due to the risk mad cow poses to human health, but a loophole in current law allows some exceptions.

The investigation into operations at the Portales Livestock Auction in Portales, New Mexico, revealed mistreatment of "downed" cattle, animals too sick or injured to walk into the auction ring for sale. Under State law, these animals must be given veterinary treatment or be humanely euthanized. Instead, they were shocked with cattle prods, dragged with chains, kicked, poked in the eyes, and pushed with tractors into standing positions so that they could enter the ring.

After the Westland investigation earlier this year, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) indicated that it would take swift action to close the "downer cow" loophole that allowed some downer cows to be slaughtered for human consumption. However, USDA has clearly not yet closed that loophole, although it did close the Westland facility.

The HSUS investigation reveals that many cows sold at the Portales auction house are slaughtered at Caviness in Hereford, Texas, and further processed at Caviness' Palo Duro plant in Amarillo, Texas. Now that Westland is out of business, Palo Duro is the top supplier of ground beef to the National School Lunch Program. HSUS's investigation ended at the Portales auction yard, and did not investigate whether the downed cows sold at Portales in fact entered the food supply.

"How can this sort of thing continue to occur?" DeFazio asked. "After Westland, the livestock industry went on record saying that the industry needs to clean up its act, but that Westland was an isolated incident. Now, it's clear that neither thing is true: the industry *hasn't* cleaned up its act, and Westland *wasn't* an isolated incident."

Last month, HSUS documented similar abuse at four other auction houses across the country.

In March 2007, DeFazio introduced the Farm Animal Stewardship Act, which would require producers who supply meat, dairy, and egg products to the federal government to meet a set of basic standards for raising farm animals. The legislation would also require the government to provide adequate veterinary care, including prompt treatment of injuries or euthanasia for a sick or injured animal.

"The USDA must act immediately to close the downer loophole," DeFazio continued. "And, it is time for Congress to lead by example and pass my bill so that inhumane treatment of animals is no longer tolerated, and tainted meat isn't served in lunchrooms across the country."