

PolicyPennings by Daryll E. Ray & Harwood D. Schaffer

Temple Grandin says the livestock industry needs to “change some practices and open up the doors”

“Fixing the slaughter plants was easy,” Temple Grandin told the 2015 annual meeting of the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). “But now I see problems that we are going to have to fix at the farm: lame dairy cows, emaciated dairy cows because somebody let them go too long, animal production to the point we are starting to have problems with animal biology” (Grandin comments at <http://tinyurl.com/qfohe24>). “We need to look at what is optimal not what is maximum.

“But what we’ve got to do is there are some practices that are going to have to change.... And there are some people in the ag industry that are not happy with me because I won’t defend everything that ag does. And we’ve got to change some practices, but what we’ve got to do is we’ve got to communicate with the public. We also have to remember that everybody has one of these [holds up cell phone] and you can’t get away from the video cameras any more. So what we need to be doing is change some practices and open up the doors.”

Grandin was at the AFBF meeting in San Diego to receive one of two Distinguished Service Awards presented to honor individuals who have devoted their careers to serving agriculture. Grandin is known to many for her work with slaughter plants to reduce animal stress during the slaughter process. The result is a system that is both more humane and more efficient. Grandin was born with autism, but ignoring the experts her parents kept her out of an institution and taught her how to speak.

After high school she went on to Franklin Pierce College and Arizona State University before receiving a PhD from the University of Illinois. Grandin is currently on the faculty at Colorado State University. She was the subject of a 2010 HBO movie, “Temple Grandin,” starring Claire Danes. She has many animal welfare videos on YouTube and is a highly sought after speaker.

The comments she made in her brief acceptance remarks are a synopsis of her paper “Animal welfare and society concerns finding the missing link,” published in *Meat Science* (Grandin, T., Animal welfare and society concerns finding the missing link, *Meat Science* (2014), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.meatsci.2014.05.011>). In that paper she points out than in today’s highly urbanized culture most young adults have little connection to or knowledge about farming and farming practices. This lack of knowledge deprives them of context when it comes to understanding a video clip involving farm animals.

Grandin writes, “Young consumers do have a desire to connect with the origin of their food.... The meat industry must start communicating more effectively with these affluent young adults. Their influence will extend beyond the developed world because they will write future legislation and policies that will have an effect on the entire world.”

To meet consumer requirements for meats, retailers and processors are increasingly implementing farm-level audits (see our columns 742 <http://tinyurl.com/147hhlf> and 743 <http://tinyurl.com/kkmwjsp>). In looking at farm-level issues, Grandin writes, “It is the author’s opinion that to pass a[n animal] welfare audit, a farm must receive an acceptable score on all of the following critical points: air quality in indoor facilities, animal stocking density, coat/feather condition, lameness, injuries, body condition, animal cleanliness, and low levels of abnormal behavior. A failing score on any one of the above critical points would be an automatic failure.”

To provide some indication of the farm-level issues Grandin discusses in her paper, we want to highlight couple of the concerns she raises. When we were growing up, the dehorning of beef and dairy cattle was a practice that few gave a second thought. Today with public concern about procedures that are painful to animals, conducting the procedure without anesthesia is increasingly being questioned. For dairy cattle, Grandin writes “Performing the operation at a young age reduces stress. Since dairy calves are intensively housed, it is practical to use a local anesthesia. Both lidocaine anesthesia and a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug are given. They are allowed to take effect before the horn bud is removed.”

In raising the issue of biological system overload, Grandin writes, “In intensively housed broiler chickens, laying hens, pigs and dairy cows, there is increasing concern that pushing the animal to produce more meat, eggs, or milk will cause both increasing welfare problems and a decline of functionality.... Green, Huxley, Banks, and Green (2014) reported that dairy cows that give more milk had thinner body condition. These two studies show that fat reserves in the body of high producing cows are reduced. In many large dairies a cow lasts for only two years of milk production. In layers, the rate of bone fractures due to osteoporosis is very high even when the hens are housed in good systems. In enriched furnished colony cages, hens had 36% keel bone fractures and in the aviary system with multi-level perches they had 80%....

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Fracture levels are so high that even in better housing the improvements are like comparing something that is atrocious to something that is poor. In the future, researchers and managers need to breed for optimal production instead of maximum production.”

Talking about industry response to consumer concerns, Grandin points out that video cameras are ubiquitous. She suggests that industry become proactive by videoing their operations so everyone can see how things work. In her remarks to the press, Grandin praised one operator for providing 24/7 camera feeds of their animal operations. She also advocates opening up farms for public tours as a means of creating an informed consumer base.

“Bad responses from the U.S. industry are so-called Ag Gag laws which make it a crime to take undercover video. This sends the wrong message to

today’s consumer. Agriculture has to look at everything it does and ask themselves, ‘Can I explain this to my guests from the city,’” Grandin writes (for a similar discussion see our column 656 <http://tinyurl.com/klwr8l5>).

Grandin’s conclusion: “The meat industry needs to be transparent and explain and show everything we do. Many practices can be easily defended but some practices will have to be changed.”

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