



March 18, 2015

Catherine E. Woteki, Ph.D.
Chief Scientist and Under Secretary
Research, Education and Economics
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Jamie L. Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Filed electronically at: ahwrpanel@usda.gov

RE: Meeting Notice of the Agricultural Research Service—Animal Handling and Welfare Review Panel

Dear Dr. Woteki:

The North American Meat Institute Foundation (NAMIF or Foundation) is a non-profit research, education and information foundation established by the North American Meat Institute. NAMIF seeks to identify technologies and practices that enable meat and poultry companies to produce safer and more nutritious meat and poultry products. The Foundation publicly disseminates research findings, best practices and other educational materials about a broad range of food safety, worker safety, animal welfare, nutrition, and consumer information projects. The Foundation appreciates the opportunity to comment on the findings of the Agricultural Research Service-Animal Handling and Welfare Review Panel (ARS-AHWR).

The Foundation commends the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for taking the timely, appropriate and decisive actions when concerns were raised about animal welfare at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC). Ensuring optimal animal care and handling is of paramount importance to the NAMIF. The Foundation has a rich history of voluntary animal handling programs that go above and beyond regulatory requirements. Proper animal handling is not only an important ethical goal; it helps also ensure that the research is conducted safely and efficiently, while maintaining the scientific integrity of animal science research.

The ARS-AHWR Recommendations Are Appropriate

The Foundation supports the ARS-AHWR recommendations and encourages USDA to implement these recommendations in a timely manner. Further, NAMIF encourages USDA to ensure all ARS animal research facilities are implementing these recommendations as well as the Ag Guide.¹ The Ag Guide is a vital reference and guiding document for the care and oversight of agricultural animals used in USDA-ARS research. The Foundation also supports continually revising the Ag Guide as new policies, technologies, and research are made available to ensure USDA-ARS is following the most current guidelines.

U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service Provides Critical Scientific Evidence to Stakeholders

The USDA-ARS staff and facilities are world renowned for their depth of talent, capabilities, and for their publication of groundbreaking scientific evidence that makes them leaders in agricultural research. The Foundation has been a longtime collaborator and funding group for USDA-ARS programs, including USMARC, and intends to continue that collaboration when opportunities are available.

Specifically, USMARC has greatly serviced the meat and poultry industry by providing timely and applicable research. Examples of those contributions are provided below.

- Animal science, animal production, and animal health experts were able to assist the swine and pork industries during the H1N1 flu crisis. Their expertise provided critical assistance on developing animal health tools to treat animals and demonstrating there was no food safety risk to the meat supply and the workers that produce it.
- Meat safety and quality researchers have developed and/or contributed to the scientific standards for meat color and tenderness evaluation, muscle biology method development, meat carcass grading technology, among others.

¹ ARS Policies and Procedures number 635.1, Humane Animal Care and Use, identifies The Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Research and Teaching (the Ag Guide), produced by the Federation of Animal Science Societies, as the primary document guiding the use of agricultural animals at ARS sites.

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- Meat safety and quality researchers have provided the beef industry the fundamental scientific evidence to support the process control systems utilized in beef plants are in control of Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC). This same team of researchers has compared commercial STEC diagnostic tests with the regulatory methods, which has provided invaluable data for the beef industry to use. Carcass mapping, vaccine development, whole genome sequencing of foodborne pathogens are examples of how USMARC meat safety and quality research is contributing to make the meat supply safer.

In summary, USDA-ARS research helps the meat and poultry industry improve the safety profile of its products.

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Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter and for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the findings of the Agricultural Research Service-Animal Handling and Welfare Review Panel.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Betsy Booren", with a long, sweeping underline.

Betsy Booren, Ph.D.
President

cc: The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture
Chavonda Jacobs-Young, Ph.D.
Barry Carpenter