

Podcast Script: Humane Slaughter Act of 1958

Hi, we are Katie and Kalena. And you're listening to More than Meat, a podcast series on Animal Agriculture Legislation. In this podcast, we will be discussing the Humane Slaughter Act of 1958.

"If I went by mail, I'd think no one was interested in anything but humane slaughter." This is what President Dwight Eisenhower said after being pressed on whether he would sign the Humane Slaughter Act in 1958. Eventually, he did sign it, but why exactly was animal rights at the forefront of policy during the 1950s, amidst the Cold War and the Civil Rights' Movement?

Before we begin, we just want to differentiate between two terms that are sometimes used interchangeably: animals rights vs animal welfare. To us, animal rights means that animals should be considered equal to humans, so animals should not be used at all for human exploitation. On the other hand, animal welfare means that humans can use animals, but emphasizes that humans are responsible for maintaining the animals well-being (including shelter, management, disease prevention and treatment, handling, and euthanasia). Using this definition, the Humane Slaughter Act is considered an animal welfare act *not* an animal rights act.

Organizations, such as the Animal Welfare Institute and The Humane Society of the United States, emerged in the 1950s. The Animal Welfare Institute was founded in 1951 and was particularly focused on alleviating suffering for animals used for experimentation, but quickly expanded their values to include other areas of animal suffering, including animal slaughtering. The Humane Society of the United States was founded by in Washington D.C. by four former members of the American Humane Association—Larry Andrews, Marcia Glaser, Helen Jones, and Fred Myers. A main philosophical influence of the founders was theologian Albert Schweitzer, who proposed the reverence-for-life concept, and author Joseph Wood Krutch, whose writings emphasized the appreciation for nonhuman life. These organizations helped to pressure political figures and educate the public on the cruelty in slaughterhouses.

Along with these groups, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey was a key figure in the Humane Slaughter Act. Known for his progressive ideas on social welfare, civil rights, and fair employment, Humphrey was always a powerful advocate for animal welfare. In fact, he authored the first humane slaughter bill and was the chief Senate sponsor of the act.

The Humane Slaughter Act became effective on August 27, 1958. The overall goal of the act was to decrease suffering of livestock during slaughter. The act requires that "all animals are rendered insensible to pain by a single blow or gunshot or an electrical, chemical or other means that is rapid and effective, before being shackled, hoisted, thrown, cast, or cut." The methods for sedation differ according to the size of the animal. For example, bovines are much larger than most livestock and thusly, require electronarcosis, which is essentially direct electrical stunning. The act itself does not mention specific methods, but rather offers a general method and therefore, authorizes the U.S Department of Agriculture to create more specific regulations on humane methods of slaughter.

Although the act was desperately needed and still is for the protection of livestock, there are fundamental criticisms of the act. The most prominent is the fact that the Humane Slaughter Act only protects “cattle, calves, horses, mules, sheep, and other livestock.” Originally, the USDA’s definition of livestock include poultry, but after extensive lobbying by poultry corporations, poultry is not longer protected under the Humane Slaughter Act. We spoke to Rohini Banskota, a graduate student at the Goldman School of Public Policy, who studies animal welfare legislation and spoke about the exclusion of poultry. **[Audio of Rohini discussing the exclusion of poultry]**.

According to the USDA, about 10 million poultry were slaughter in the U.S. in 2017. Additionally, the gap between poultry consumption and beef consumption is closing, meaning that the popularity of poultry is on the rise, which only reinforces the need for poultry to be included. Furthermore, there are controversies surrounding the standard method of killing chickens. Chickens undergo an electric immobilization method where they are paralyzed, but conscious, when they are slaughtered. This process of slaughtering chickens defies the act’s purpose because the chickens are not rendered to pain before slaughter. Other limitations of the act include the exclusion of animals killed in ritual slaughter and the lack of a general enforcement mechanism. We spoke to Rohini about the different loopholes and weaknesses of the act. **[Audio of Rohini discussing the limitations and how it can be improved]**

Senator Humphrey also addressed the limitations in the beginning, describing the legislation as “a mild and modest beginning in the field of humane slaughter.” Despite an amendment of the act, the original limitations have not effectively been addressed. In 1978, required that livestock imported into the US meet equally humane slaughter standards and also gave USDA inspectors the power to stop the slaughtering line if they observe cruelty. In 2002, there wasn’t exactly an amendment, but the Farm Bill stated that the regulations of the HSA should be fully enforced and that the Secretary of Agriculture track violations better. In another podcast episode, Brianna discusses the relationship between lobbying and legislation, and how it may explain some of these weaknesses.

Today, the Humane Slaughter Act is enforced by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, or FSIS for short, but many criticize that the USDA is not effectively enforcing the regulations outlined in the HSA. One of the most notable violations when was an undercover investigation conducted by the Humane Society of the United States revealed the cruelty in the Catelli Bros. of Shrewsbury factory. The undercover observed the following: still conscious veal calves struggling while hanging on the conveyor belt, calves being shot multiple times before reaching unconsciousness, a driver dragging a calf with a chain around its neck, managers twisting the ears and tails of calves, and employees shocking, hitting, and spraying calves with water. As a result, the USDA’s FSIS finally announced in July 2016 that facilities must provide a humane euthanasia for veal cows who are sick, disabled, or dying.

One of the most interesting points of this investigation is that it was not USDA inspectors that revealed the cruelty, but rather the HSUS. In fact, according to the USDA’s “Slaughter Inspection 101” guide, inspectors are only required to be present ante mortem and post mortem, so not at the actual point of slaughter. How could one accurately assess whether cruelty is taking place and if the animal is unconscious at the time of slaughter, if an inspector is not there at the time of slaughter??

We understand that logistically, this is daunting— with a limited number of federal inspectors and thousands of slaughterhouses, it is difficult to stay during the entire process. Additionally, the speed of production affects how effectively the inspection is. Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*, explains that slaughterhouses will process between 300-400 cattle every hour. With the pressure to move extremely quickly, the well-being for the animal, and the employee for that matter, suffers.

Slaughterhouse workers suffer when they work as slaughterers. In the notable article called, “The Chain Never Stops” by Eric Schlosser, he calls out the harsh working conditions in slaughterhouses. Schlosser opens his article by describing the story of Kenny Dobbins, a slaughterhouse worker from Monfort Beef Company. Dobbins spent two decades at the company where he suffered constant life-threatening injuries over the course of 20 years. He was struck by a 90-pound box of meat and pinned against the conveyor belt. He had back surgery because he blew out a disc. He spent a month in the hospital because he had burned lungs from inhaling too much chlorine. He hurt his left shoulder when a 10,000 pound hammer mill dropped on his arm. He broke his leg, shattered his ankle, and so many bruises/cuts that he could remember. The Humane Slaughter Act has not created any benefits for either humans or animals, instead it has damaged and killed the lives of both animals and humans. It leads us to ask if humane slaughter even exists if it is just hurting so many lives?

The suffering of agricultural animals and slaughterhouse workers are being censored by big agribusinesses. Animal-agriculture industry has been behind the “ag-gag” bills by pushing them across the country. This bill punishes anyone that publish the horrific conditions of animal agriculture facilities without the owner’s permission which makes it impossible for employees and animal advocacy groups to expose animal cruelty and safety violations. There are currently 6 states who have ag-gag laws on their books: Alabama, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and North Carolina. In Utah and Idaho, federal judges have struck down ag-gag laws because it was declared unconstitutional. Animal advocacy organizations like Animal Legal Defense Fund and The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have been fighting against the ag-gag laws. Ag-gag laws should be a issue that everyone needs to worry about. The laws violate animal welfare, food safety, marketplace transparency, workers’ rights, free speech, and environmental protection. Rohini discusses this in more detail. **[Audio of Rohini discussing ag-gag laws]**

Additionally, the USDA has been the leading force in refusing to regulate the Humane Slaughter Act. According to an article published in the Georgetown Law Journal, USDA inspectors neglect to regulate humane treatment of animals slaughtered in the slaughterhouses. One example comes from a small slaughterhouse in Minneapolis where a cow was repeatedly electrocuted under the supervision of two USDA inspectors. The plant was cited thirteen times in the course of 8 months, but the plant today is still operational. It also has yet to be charged with cruelty to animals or criminal violation of humane slaughter laws. And it has not been threatened of being shut down for its illegal slaughtering of animals.

Another failure of the USDA in protecting animal welfare is its shutdown of Animal Care Information System (ACIS). The ACIS is an online searchable database that consists of reports of how animals are being treated in laboratories and whether those facilities are complying with the Animal Welfare Act. The USDA and Plant Health Inspection Service shutdown this service on February 2017 with transparent

reasons. The loss of the database has been a low blow for journalists who utilize the database to expose the inhumane treatment of animals for research. One prime example comes from Harvard University, who closed its research facility because they imprisoned thousands of monkeys without proper treatment and care. As a result, the university had to pay a \$24,000 fine. The abuse and mistreatment would not have come into light if a journalist did not utilize the database to write articles to expose the violations conducted by the staff. It is still unknown to who is behind the shutdown of the ACIS, although Trump's administration has been pulling off government regulated sites. There is currently a lawsuit being filed by the Physicians Committee against the USDA, but no updates have been made since the lawsuit was filed in February 2017.

So what needs to be changed about the act? We asked Rohini on what she thought. **[Audio of Rohini discussing the changes]**

The concept of humane slaughter has been heavily debated. Many argue how can humane slaughter of animals be "humane" when animals are kept in a cage life for human use and oppression? Essentially, many argue that human slaughter is an oxymoron. In fact, many people argue that humane slaughter is a concept that fulfills one's moral obligation with the idea that if the animal they consume are treated with compassion, then it is okay to eat it. So, we need to ask ourselves what is the solution? Is it veganism? **[Audio of Rohini discussing her thoughts whether humane slaughter is an oxymoron]**

We want to emphasize that the Humane Slaughter Act is currently the ONLY piece of legislation that offers protection for agricultural animals. So after thoroughly depressing you, what can we do now to protect agricultural animals? Currently, the Protect Interstate Commerce Act is proposed in the 2018 Farm Bill. The Protect Interstate Commerce Act states its purpose: "To prevent States and local jurisdictions from interfering with the production and distribution of agricultural products in interstate or foreign commerce, and for other purposes." Rohini elaborates on this in greater detail **[Audio of Rohini discussing the commerce act and what she wants to see]**

If this bill were to pass, no state could propose stricter animal welfare laws than another state and all states would need to repeal current animal welfare laws. We would like to point out that the act was introduced by Iowa's Republican Representative Steve King, who has defended dog fighting, cockfighting, puppy mills, the consumption of cat meat, and the sport-hunting of threatened polar bears. In order to ensure state's rights to provide stricter animal welfare legislation, this proposed act cannot pass. Here the answer to your question of what can we do: First, be aware and educated on the issue and spread that knowledge. Second, call your state senator and representatives and express your concern with this bill (and if you can call Iowa's too!) Lastly, VOTE.

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