

# Dealing with Hidden Cameras

CFI's Animal Welfare Review Panel analyzes undercover probe at Iowa hog farm.

**H**idden camera investigations at livestock farms have heightened public attention on animal care issues. In an effort to foster a more balanced conversation and to provide credible feedback to promote continuous improvement in farm animal care, the Center for Food Integrity (CFI) has created an Animal Care Review Panel.

The panel, made up of recognized animal well-being experts, will examine video footage and report back to the public. The process has been established initially for the pork industry, but CFI is willing to engage with other sectors of animal agriculture as they show interest.

The panel will include an animal scientist, a veterinarian and an ethicist to assure various perspectives are represented. CFI is recruiting several experts to participate in the process, but for the video investigation at a swine operation in Iowa

released in mid-February by Compassion Over Killing, the panel is comprised of Temple Grandin, Colorado State University; Candace Croney, Purdue University; and Tom Burkgren, American Association of Swine Veterinarians.

Ideally, the panel will receive complete and in-context video footage from the organization that obtained it. This will provide the best opportunity for the experts to have a full understanding of the situation. Short of that, the panel will review edited segments that have been released to the public.

After reviewing the video released in mid-

February the panel made the following observations:

► Most of what is shown in the video is normally accepted production practices and there was nothing that could be considered abusive. It was noted that employees appeared to be competent and well-trained and that the barn

floors and the pigs themselves were clean.

- In one scene, an employee is shown castrating and docking the tail of a piglet in close proximity to the mother. The video contends the sow is grunting in distress. One of the experts said that while it is likely that the sow experiences some distress in such a situation, both the sow and her piglets would probably experience similar or greater levels of stress if the piglet was transported elsewhere.
- An employee is seen using tape on a piglet's incisions following castration. One of the experts noted such a practice is considered more welfare friendly than stitches because it is less intrusive and requires less handling of the pig.
- There was a short glimpse in the video of what appeared to be a herniated piglet and it was implied the condition was caused by incorrect castration. One expert noted the assertion is not correct

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— that the condition was likely related to genetics.

- ▶ A scene showing several flies in a farrowing room was a point of concern and something the experts thought should be corrected.
- ▶ Another point of concern is a portion of the video addressing the practice of “back feeding” — a process in which organs of piglets that have died are fed to the sows to boost their immune systems. The experts noted that it is unclear if this practice involves sows or pigs and its exact purpose. It is a normally accepted production practice used to stimulate the immune systems of pregnant sows late in gestation. This

results in more effective and improved passive immunity that is passed from the mother to her offspring through the colostrum.

- ▶ A sow shown walking awkwardly because its hooves had not been properly trimmed was also discussed. The experts noted the hooves should have been trimmed, but they would have preferred seeing more than just a few seconds of the sow in question so it could be determined if there was a lameness issue.

The issue of only seeing brief scenes was a common concern for the experts. They noted that seeing longer excerpts from the video would allow them to place the practices in better context to allow for evaluation that encourages continuous improvement. Attempts by CFI to secure longer video

segments from Compassion Over Killing were unsuccessful. CFI remains committed to working with animal protection groups to secure more complete video for evaluation.

The Animal Care Review Panel operates independently. Its reviews, assessments, recommendations and reports will not be submitted to the pork industry for review or approval. CFI’s only role is to facilitate the review process and release the panel’s findings. The opinions expressed in the review are solely those of the expert panel.



**Editor’s Note:** *This article was provided as a release by Jim Fallon of the Center for Food Integrity, a nonprofit organization established to build consumer trust and confidence in today’s food system. The center does not lobby or advocate for individual food companies or brands. For more information, visit [www.foodintegrity.org](http://www.foodintegrity.org).*