



**Cornell University**  
**College of Agriculture**  
**and Life Sciences**

**Joe M. Regenstein**  
*Professor of Food Science*

Department of Food  
Science  
Cornell University  
Stocking Hall  
Ithaca, NY 14853-7201

Telephone: 607 255-8041  
Fax: 607 254-4868  
E-mail: [jmr9@cornell.edu](mailto:jmr9@cornell.edu)  
[www.foodscience.cornell.edu](http://www.foodscience.cornell.edu)

April 26, 2017

Dear Mr. Weyts,

I am writing to you following recent reports that quote you as saying that un-stunned slaughter is outdated. I must disagree. Many on-farm slaughters and both Jewish and Muslim religious slaughter of animals use this method and when done right it can be very humane and may even be more humane than interventions such as cracking the skull, cracking the skull open, electrocuting and gasing animals. (When you describe stunned slaughter this way it does not sound anywhere as nice!)

The very act of slaughtering an animal is often difficult for many people to deal with. The best observations on the religious slaughter of animals have been made by Dr. Temple Grandin, Professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University in the USA, probably the foremost on animal welfare in the world. She has worked hard all of her life to improve both secular slaughter and religious slaughter and is well known globally for these efforts. What she has brought to the field is a strong sense of observation based on her own autism that allows her to focus on the details. And then she uses what she learns to work with the meat companies and religious establishments to improve the slaughter of animals.

Both secular and religious slaughter depend on a whole lot of details being done right prior to the actual moment of slaughter. With secular slaughter, one key element to measure is the number of initial mis-stuns. Her standard, which is used in the US by all organizations including the animal activists allows a 5% mis-stun rate (i.e., the North American Meat Institute Guidelines for Slaughter). With a lot of effort in the last few years by the meat processing industry working with Dr. Grandin and her associates, the number of mis-stuns for many of the larger plants in the USA has been brought down to 1.5% or so. With a large plant that still means that 5 to 6 animals every HOUR are mis-stunned and essentially totally stressed thereafter until one or more subsequent stuns finally makes them unconscious.

Dr. Grandin and I have also written the American Veterinary Medicine Association's section on the religious slaughter of animals of their new Humane Slaughter Guidelines. Again, these are part of the effort in the USA to work with the industry and the religious authorities to improve all forms of slaughter.

Please also note that the real issues scientifically are and pain. These in principle can be measured objectively. The issue of suffering in general for animals has been too difficult to unravel and in the short period around slaughter it is particularly difficult to discuss in those terms. Doing so is mostly anthropomorphic. With religious slaughter of animals the concerns need to focus on improving the details of the process. One such area is in the design of the equipment used to restrain the animal and the lead up to the restraining pen. Another issue is the handling of the head holder. Finally an extremely important element according to Dr. Grandin is the shape and sharpness of the knife and the total absence of nicks. It is both her and my belief that the absence of nicks is critically **for** religious slaughter of animals. Much of the research on religious slaughter has not even addressed the quality of the knives used in the work. And in some cases it is obvious that the knife shape and the machine sharpening of the knife that was used for these recent research

studies were simply inappropriate. Dr. Grandin felt so strongly about this, that she actually for the first time in her career put a disclaimer on her web site ([www.grandin.com](http://www.grandin.com)). Yet these papers continue to be quoted as a major piece of research evidence casting a negative light on religious slaughter of animals.

In recent years a new instrument has become available that actually measures both the sharpness and the absence of nicks and is being evaluated by the religious communities and the scientific community actually interested in improving the slaughter of animals as a way to improve their slaughter. There is also very preliminary evidence that with a truly sharp cut, the animal may experience an endorphin release. These are opiates that lead to such feelings as “runners high” so one might even postulate that the traditional religious slaughter of the animal actually allows it to die on a high.

And the religious slaughter of animals is done by a person who is a caring human being with a high level of concern for animal welfare and strong religious beliefs. That is somewhat different from the “mechanization of slaughter” in most meat plants, with those doing the slaughter having minimal respect for the taking of an animal’s life. So the assumption that religious slaughter of animals, which is generally slower and less efficient than secular slaughter, is less humane is potential very misleading and may in fact be wrong.

Thus, we hope that you and your government would respect the religious diversity within your country and within Europe and work with both the secular and religious authorities to make all slaughter of animals meet the highest standards possible today, what is often referred to as best practices. Working with the religious communities one can make progress much faster and help to improve the social structure of your country. By threatening minority communities, one only alienates them and sets up situations that will not allow us all to move forward to create a diversified country where everyone can thrive. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we would be happy to provide additional scientific documentation including a detailed analysis of the scientific literature that has so often been misleading at best and often intentionally distorted.

Sincerely,



Joe M. Regenstein, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus of Food Science  
Head: Cornell Kosher and Halal Food Initiative  
Department of Food Science  
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, New York 14853-7201

Co-Editor-in-Chief: Food Bioscience  
Distinguished Foreign Expert, Jiangnan University, Wuxi, Jiangsu, China  
Adjunct Professor, Chiang Mia University, Chiang Mia, Thailand  
Adjunct Professor, Kansas State University  
Adjunct Professor, Department of Population Medicine and Diagnostic Science, College of Veterinarian Medicine, Cornell University  
Member of the Jewish Studies Program, College of Arts and Sciences, Cornell University  
Member of the Comparative Muslim Societies Program, College of Arts and Sciences, Cornell University

The opinions in this letter are those of the author and do not represent the position of Cornell University.