



Animal Welfare Institute

900 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003

October 14, 2021

Steve Soyka, Stearns County Sheriff
705 Courthouse Square
St. Cloud, MN 56303

Via USPS and email

Re: Request for investigation of Jennie-O Turkey Store and employees for cruelty to animals in your jurisdiction

Dear Sheriff Soyka,

I write on behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute (“AWI”) to ask that your office investigate and request prosecution for the repeated instances of animal cruelty and neglect detailed in the enclosed documents.

On September 13, 2021, AWI reached out to Stearns County Attorney Janelle P. Kendall asking her office investigate and prosecute these instances of animal cruelty and neglect. As we have received no response from Ms. Kendall’s office, AWI is requesting that the Stearns County Sheriff’s Office and asking that it investigate the following incidents:

In April, May, and June 2021, the Jennie-O Turkey Store (“Jennie-O”) facility located in Melrose, Minnesota, had *five* incidents that appear to constitute cruelty to birds under Minn. Stat. § 343.21 (Attachment 1). During these incidents, hundreds of turkeys suffered and perished in extreme summer heat with temperatures between 93 and 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Turkeys were left in direct sunlight for hours in transport trailers with no heat abatement (i.e., shelter, fans, misters). The Minnesota statute prohibits deprivation of necessary food, water, and shelter to any animal. It is also unlawful to neglect or abandon an animal, or to keep an animal in an enclosure without providing a change of air. This neglect resulted in moderate to extreme heat stress in the birds. Employees were directed to provide fans, misters, and shade to the animals but failed to do so. These instances are detailed in the attached letter to County Attorney Kendall (Attachment 3).

AWI was established in 1951 to reduce the suffering caused by humans to animals, including farm animals subject to transport and slaughter. AWI monitors transport and holding conditions faced by animals sent to slaughter facilities and encourages local prosecution of cruelty and neglect. It is our opinion that the incidents described above are particularly egregious, especially given the pattern of repeat offenses.

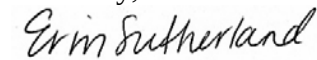
AWI obtained this information from U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection records. Although the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (“FSIS”) regulates slaughter, sanitation, and inspection of poultry processing facilities, it does *not* regulate the treatment of poultry awaiting slaughter in transport trailers. The FSIS, however, does acknowledge the authority of

state officials to prosecute incidents in which the treatment of birds at federal slaughterhouses violate that state's animal cruelty statute.¹

As stated above, the documented incidents appear to constitute cruelty to birds under Minn. Stat. § 343.21. Investigation and eventual prosecution should be strongly considered to avoid future incidents of this nature and to ensure those who engage in this kind of behavior are held responsible.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or would like to arrange a meeting, please contact me via email at erin@awionline.org or by phone at 202-446-2147.

Sincerely,



Erin Sutherland
Staff Attorney
Farm Animal Program

¹ FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE, Directive 6910.1: District Veterinary Medical Specialist (DVMS) – Work Methods, 19–20 (2009) https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_file/2020-07/6910.1.pdf.