



EXPOSING CRUEL RESEARCH

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING PROMPTS WIDESPREAD OUTRAGE // BY BETH JOACK

MICHAEL MOSS happened upon a bleating, newborn lamb left all alone on a Nebraska pasture. With a hailstorm approaching, the animal—abandoned by her mother, starving, without shelter—faced certain death. Moss would later describe this scene as haunting.

“I think for that moment, I felt what ranchers and farmers feel when they see their animals suffer and die,” Moss says. “In this case, the difference was that it was part of the program to allow that death to happen by design as the scientists labored to create stronger, more profitable sheep.”

The Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter traveled to Clay Center, Nebraska, last year to report on the treatment of sheep, cows and pigs at the taxpayer-funded U.S. Meat Animal Research Center. Along with the visit, Moss combed through a pile of documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the center.

The resulting exposé, which ran on the front page of *The New York Times* in January, painted a horrific picture of scientists doing experiments such as leaving lambs to fend for themselves as part of an attempt to breed so-called “easy care” sheep. Another test forced pigs into steam chambers to study their appetites. And the center failed at even the most basic aspects of animal care: Moss reported thousands of animals were allowed to starve to death.

The article, and an accompanying photo of a pile of dead lambs, generated immediate outrage and alarm. Sen. Cory Booker posted a reaction on Twitter the day the story ran, writing that Moss’ article “speaks to a level of cruelty to animals that is unacceptable.” By early February, the *New Jersey Democrat*, along with a bipartisan slate of lawmakers, had introduced the Animal Welfare in Agricultural

Research Endeavors (AWARE) Act in the House and Senate. The bill would eliminate a loophole that exempts farm animals used in agricultural experiments from Animal Welfare Act protections.

The HSUS mobilized advocates to encourage their legislators to support the act. Kathleen Conlee, HSUS vice president of animal research issues, says her office also has requested thousands of pages of documents and is researching the facility.

Following the uproar over Moss’ reporting, the USDA published its own report, prepared after a three-day, preannounced visit to the facility in February. The authors

found the center provided inadequate oversight of animal care and research projects and that employees need a clearly defined training program in animal handling. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced the center will not



Michael Moss

be allowed to begin any new experiments until the situation improves.

Moss began looking into the facility after receiving a tip in late 2013 from veterinarian and epidemiologist James Keen, who had worked there for more than 20 years. Attempts to reach Keen at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he now works, were not successful, but Moss reported that Keen said he's been forbidden to return to the facility after allowing in a reporter. Moss believes the whistleblower faced other ramifications as well.

"I think he has felt some criticism from peers for speaking out," Moss says, "but he's also been receiving an incredible amount of support from colleagues who for one reason or another weren't able to speak out like he was but are expressing gratitude that he did."

Beyond the gruesome animal abuse, Moss' article also touched on the trend of consumers demanding more humanely raised meat.

"What the story did," he says, "was reflect this growing concern among people about what they put in their bodies, where their food comes from, both from a health standpoint and an animal welfare standpoint."

During his reporting, Moss located several meat producers who objected to the experiments. One rancher Moss interviewed came close to tears when talking about the responsibility he felt toward his animals.

"That emotion that they feel and the dedication they have to doing right by their animals above and beyond the financial gains was really moving to me," Moss says. "There are many producers who feel strongly that we have an obligation to treat farm animals as well as we possibly can because we're raising them and growing them to eat them, especially for that reason."

+ URGE YOUR LEGISLATORS to close the animal research loophole at humansociety.org/aware-act.



Rescuers clean a pelican covered in oil after the Gulf Coast spill in 2010.

FIVE YEARS LATER ...

OIL SPILL STILL HURTING GULF ECOSYSTEM // BY KAREN E. LANGE

WHEN SHARON YOUNG VISITED THE GULF OF MEXICO in 2010 as part of an HSUS team, images of oil-coated pelicans and dolphins swimming in fouled waters were all over the news. But it was the plight of a tiny creature she found after the BP oil spill that April that touched her most: an oil-drenched hermit crab she spotted as she walked on a beach that had just been quickly "cleaned."

"In the little, tiny tide pools, there are [still] pockets of oil. And here was this hermit crab walking around in them," says Young, HSUS marine issues field director. "It's just tragic, and part of the tragedy is nobody sees it."

Now, five years after the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig exploded and sank, Young says it's easy to overlook the lasting changes the 87-day spill has caused in the gulf. Dispersants used to clean up millions of barrels of oil reduced the amount that washed onto beaches, but those chemicals, toxic to marine life, remain in the sediments, water column and food chain. Dolphins are still stranding and dying at elevated rates. There's still oil soaked into marshes where birds nest but few people go. That's why, she says, it's crucial that organizations like The HSUS keep attention focused on the damage to animals and the protections they need to recover.

Young is supporting endangered status for a genetically isolated group of Bryde's whales who live in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico. Fewer than 50 of them remain. Even before the spill, their numbers were small and their habitat disrupted by underwater noise from oil and gas exploration, which makes it hard for them to communicate and navigate, she says.

She's also representing animals by serving on several federal advisory groups, including one that monitors marine mammals from Texas to Maine, and by speaking up at conferences, such as a recent Gulf of Mexico workshop in New Orleans organized by the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission. She and Elizabeth Fetherston, marine restoration strategist for the Ocean Conservancy, were among the few conservationists at that meeting, where researchers presented studies documenting the oil's effects on species such as sea turtles and coral.

Billions of dollars from legal settlements will eventually be available to help the recovery, perhaps as soon as 2018, says Fetherston. But advocates need the public's help to make sure the money goes to animals, she says. "It's really only in the outcry that that will become a reality."