

January 5, 2007

Dear Friends,

A few months ago I wrote to you about the abusive treatment of some of the cattle by a few *glatt* kosher butchering plants. In that letter, I described the possibility that a company could treat its animals in certain inhumane ways (according to modern standards of ethics) but that this treatment would not render the meat non-kosher. In addition, even when these companies did not treat its workers properly, they may have been in violation of *halachic* requirements detailing how one must treat his/her workers, but such violations did not render the meat produced at these plants non-kosher. I urged you to think about not buying the meat from companies that maintain the letter of the law but abuse the spirit of the law. When I spoke about this issue on Shabbat a few months back, many of you articulated a desire to be able to make such decisions but felt that you lacked the tools to do so.

I am pleased to announce that the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and the Rabbinical Assembly have joined together to create a commission that will provide kosher meat and poultry packing companies with a “*tsedek hecksher*,” or additional certification that identifies companies that meet acceptable standards of worker and animal treatment. The press release states that “the commission’s overriding objective is to ensure that the American Jewish community can continue to be able to buy kosher meat with full confidence in its integrity as a kosher product and in the presence of Jewish values in the production process.” After conducting a number of site visits to the AgriProcessor plant in Pottsville, the commission concluded that there were a number of violations in the area of worker’s health and safety. The commission has determined that “further visits may include assessments of the conditions and treatment of animals...and an assessment of the effects of their products on the environment by these same and other food processors.”

As the commission's work gets under way, I will keep you informed as to which companies receive the "*tsedek hecksher*." I am proud to say that our movement is blazing the trail with regard to this work. I hope that we will have enough muscle to put pressure on these companies to affirm Jewish values through the way they treat their employees and their animals.

*B'chvod Rav,*

Rabbi David A. Schuck