



SCHOOL OF VETERINARY MEDICINE  
VETERINARY MEDICINE TEACHING & RESEARCH CENTER

18830 ROAD 112  
TULARE, CALIFORNIA 93274  
559/688-1731

<http://vmtrc.ucdavis.edu>

May 27, 2004

Senator Raymond J. Lesniak  
Chair, Committee on Economic Growth  
985 Stuyvesant Ave.  
Union, NJ 07083

Senator Lesniak:

It has come to my attention that the New Jersey Senate Economic Growth Committee heard testimony on May 10 regarding S159 (veal calf management) and that some of the testimony related to one of our clients, Rancho Vitello Veal Calf Ranch. I have been provided a transcript of the testimony relating to Rancho Vitello and find the given testimony an untrue and inaccurate representation of calf health at Rancho Vitello. I am responding because it is imperative that legislators hear correct information so that honest decisions can be made regarding public policies.

The following statement has been attributed to Mr. Drew Vermier during the hearing before your committee on May 10<sup>th</sup>:

“We worked very closely with [Rancho Vitello]. They have adopted the European style system. They are not, as we say, roses and wonderful things, they have much higher death loss, they have much higher operating costs. They have a major problem with poor growth rate in the calves and a higher sickness just the same as they have experienced in Europe.”

I provide veterinary services to Rancho Vitello as part of my duties as a dairy production medicine clinician with the University of California, Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine. Because of my interest in farm animal welfare (I chair the American Association of Bovine Practitioners Animal Welfare Committee), Joost Teunissen, managing partner of Rancho Vitello, asked me to help develop a humanely raised veal program for the ranch. Mr. Teunissen and I developed a system based on the European Union standards for veal raising and the program has been audited to be in compliance with those standards.

Rancho Vitello does not “have much higher death loss”. In fact, the mortality rate is about half that on other calf ranches in California.

Rancho Vitello does not have “higher sickness”. The morbidity rate is very low in the veal calves and is the lowest for any calf ranch we work with.

I cannot speak directly about operating costs compared to other veal ranches, but I can point out that feed costs are much lower at Rancho Vitello because the calves are fed dry feed (grain) in order to stimulate rumen development. Grain is much cheaper than milk replacer and calves have maintained the same high rate of gain. In addition, antibiotic use has been decreased dramatically since the humane raising program has been started, resulting in thousands of dollars savings each month. In fact, the ranch uses a fraction of the antibiotics it used in previous years.



SCHOOL OF VETERINARY MEDICINE  
VETERINARY MEDICINE TEACHING & RESEARCH CENTER

18830 ROAD 112  
TULARE, CALIFORNIA 93274  
559/688-1731

<http://vmtrc.ucdavis.edu>

I am at Rancho Vitello at least once per week. I have never met Mr. Vermier. To my knowledge, he has not been involved in the development of the humane veal raising program at Rancho Vitello.

The calves at Rancho Vitello are, in the veterinary sense, very healthy and growing exceptionally well. The concepts of providing them space to turn around, group housing and solid feed have proven sound and economical. The idea that dry feed (grain, hay, or roughage) causes abomasal ulcers is false. Calves do not develop ulcers from eating solid feed. Millions of calves in the US are fed grain from the first days of life because that develops the rumen and it is the most economical way of raising calves.

The basic intent of S159 appears to be to provide young veal calves enough room in which to turn around. This seems to be a basic welfare principle to me. We would not tolerate any other species being raised for five months without turning around. Imagine a foal, or puppy, or lamb or any other animal chained so that it cannot turn around as it grows. Just because it has been common for veal calves to be raised that way does not justify the situation.

This issue has been economically very detrimental to the veal industry. USDA statistics show that one-sixth of the veal was consumed in the US in 2002 as compared to 1954. Consumers appear to want assurances that farm animals are raised with respect and dignity and the market for humanely raised veal is growing. This is an area where economic, biologic and animal welfare issues come together for the benefit of everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide accurate information regarding calf health at Rancho Vitello. Please distribute this information to other Senators on the Economic Growth Committee and others with interest in this issue. I am available to answer any questions you or your staff may have on this important animal welfare issue.

Sincerely,

Jim Reynolds DVM, MPVM  
Chief of Service, Dairy Production Medicine  
Veterinary Medicine Teaching and Research Center  
School of Veterinary Medicine  
University of California, Davis  
18830 Road 112  
Tulare, CA 93274

Mobile: (559) 786-4584  
Office: (559) 688-1731  
Email: [jreynold@vmtrc.ucdavis.edu](mailto:jreynold@vmtrc.ucdavis.edu)

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

---

BERKELEY • DAVIS • IRVINE • LOS ANGELES • RIVERSIDE • SAN FRANCISCO

---



---

SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

---

SCHOOL OF VETERINARY MEDICINE  
VETERINARY MEDICINE TEACHING & RESEARCH CENTER

18830 ROAD 112  
TULARE, CALIFORNIA 93274  
559/688-1731

**<http://vmtrc.ucdavis.edu>**