

# MEATY CONTROVERSY

DEQ and USDA put local meatpacking company on notice

**O**n Thanksgiving Day 2014, a truck from California came to Bartels Packing west of Eugene carrying 35 organic cattle. Kandi Bartels, executive vice president of Bartels, which produces grass-fed natural and organic beef, says the paperwork from the driver stated there were two bulls and 33 cows in the shipment.

According to a Nov. 28 USDA “notice of enforcement action,” a Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) consumer safety inspector “observed an overcrowded pen, with 35 head of cattle being held in a pen that usually holds 23 head.”

The inspector “observed three cattle that were down in the overcrowded pen and were unable to get up, due to limited space in the pen. One animal was lying on top of another, and the third animal had its leg stuck under the pen fence and was unable to rise,” according to the notice. That cow was later euthanized, according to the report.

The incident involving the injured cow is not the first time Bartels Farms has been put on notice or fined by a government agency since 2002. Bartels has also received enforcement letters from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality about its wastewater from the meatpacking facility.

Kandi Bartels says the company has never willfully made mistakes or tried to cut corners to save money. “We really just do care,” she says. “We live here too; this is our community.”

While the driver’s paperwork said there were two bulls in the shipment, Kandi Bartels says there were actually six bulls and 29 cows, and the extra bulls were not correctly identified as such. Bartels says the driver and the Bartels security guard unloaded the cattle and put the two identified bulls in a separate pen and temporarily put the rest of cattle in a pen for 35 cattle and an adjoining alley for 20. The gate was left open to assure the cattle could get water.

But against company procedures, the gate was not chained open and the four “young aggressive bulls” left in with the heifers shoved the gate closed, cutting off access to water, and began to “ride” some of the heifers, causing them to go down, Bartels said in a statement.

The statement continues, “We take this very seriously and took immediate action to remedy the situation.” Bartels says

the cow was down for about 20 minutes, and that a security guard inspects the cattle every two hours, 24 hours day, seven days a week, even on the holiday weekend.

“We feel great remorse that any animal suffered because company protocol was not followed,” the statement says.

Bartels took corrective action, Kandi Bartels says, and has made sure all workers who receive, sort, pen and unload animals are trained in proper procedures and sign a “proof of knowledge of training” form. Bartels says the facility’s slaughterhouse procedures are based on the work of Temple Grandin, a professor of animal sciences known for her efforts to make slaughter, or as Bartels calls it “harvest,” less stressful.

According to Bartels the company hires workers with quiet demeanors able to “read” cattle to move them through the chutes with minimal stress. Stress is measured by the animals’ vocalizations. The less noise they make, the less stressed they are.

According to FSIS Public Affairs Specialist Lauren Kotwicki, “FSIS followed protocol to notify the company and they are currently making corrective actions. FSIS is verifying those actions and at this time we have no additional information.”

Kandi Bartels says, “I hate that it happened,” and points out there was no fee or fine from the agency. She says that aside from this incident, Bartels has scored very high on its Safe Quality Food (SQF) audits. Bartels’ SQF and quality control manager Rodolfo Mendoza says the company has passed at least six SQF audits, some at midnight and 2 am, since the November incident.

Also, in the fall of 2014, Bartels was cited by the DEQ for submitting late annual reports and incomplete data reports of the sampling of its wastewater. Kandi Bartels says the company was compiling annual reports, but that it was unaware the reports were in the wrong format.

In February of 2014, according to the DEQ, Bartels was given a notice of noncompliance for “discharging blood wastes to the Fern Ridge Reservoir.” Under its permit, Bartels can beneficially reuse the wastewater but not discharge it into state waters.

The DEQ’s Compliance and Enforcement division lists more than \$70,000 in fines paid by Bartels from 2002 to 2013, several related to an underground storage tank and others to discharges and monitoring data.

In a 2013 press release about a previous discharge into a ditch that flows to Fern Ridge, DEQ writes, “Since DEQ

first observed the above-noted discharges, Bartels Packing has made significant improvements to its wastewater treatment and disposal system.”

Bartels shared with *EW* emails to DEQ and Department of Agriculture officials about the water issues.

Kandi Bartels wrote to the DEQ asking, “In the face of the social media attack that has begun because we are perceived as ‘dumping blood waste’ into the Fern Ridge Reservoir from the publicity of the February breach and the 2011 breaches, are there water tests on file that prove we contaminate Fern Ridge Reservoir?”

— KANDI BARTELS,  
BARTELS FARMS

**‘I hate that it happened.’**

Paul Kennedy of the DEQ responded, “I have not taken any water samples from Fern Ridge Reservoir.”

He says the February 2014 incident occurred when water overflowed a dike, and “to address the overflow, Bartels obtained a special letter permit from DEQ last year allowing them to improve their wastewater system by adding a second wastewater lagoon. Bartels also prepared and submitted its annual reports for 2012 and 2013.”

Kennedy adds, “DEQ is still processing the enforcement action associated with the annual report violations.”

According to Bartel’s emails, the company has improved capture of the blood on the “harvest floor,” and Kandi Bartels says the company hired the engineering and environmental science firm Kennedy/Jenks for the construction of lagoons for treating the wastewater. Delta Environmental Services is now doing the water monitoring, she says.

Kandi Bartels also objects to the characterization of the wastewater as blood waste, as she says the blood is hauled away, at one point to be upcycled into biofuel and currently to a methane digester. The percentage of blood in the water left behind, she says, is very small.

In an April email to Kennedy/Jenks, Kandi Bartels writes, “I agree with Paul [Kennedy] that too much blood was going into the lagoon with the wastewater,” and she writes “those entrusted with oversight were not aware our crew was doing such a poor job of blood segregation.”

But she adds, “This is no longer the case.”

Kandi Bartels says as an organic meatpacking company that runs cattle and reuses nitrogen-rich wastewater to fertilize its fields, sometimes there are odors that can’t be dealt with chemically, but she hopes neighbors will call if there are any issues.

“What life do you have if you are not a good neighbor?” she asks. ■

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