

USDA cites 4 plants for inhumane treatment

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- Four of 18 beef slaughterhouses supplying meat to U.S. school lunch programs were cited for inhumane treatment of cattle, a federal report to Congress said. The U.S. Agriculture Department's audit released to Congress indicated one slaughterhouse was temporarily closed, USA Today reported Wednesday. Congress sought the audit after the shutdown of Westland/Hallmark Meat Packing Co. of Chino, Calif., a school lunch supplier cited for violating health rules on humane handling of animals. A USDA letter to Sen. Herbert Kohl, D-Wis., chair of an agriculture subcommittee, said the unnamed plant did not effectively stun cattle on the first attempt before slaughter. The plant corrected the problem and lost about a half day of production, a USDA spokeswoman said. The USDA letter said the 17 other plants had "acceptable humane-handling programs and practices." It cited one facility for cattle overcrowding, one for excessive use of stunning prods and one for conditions allowing excessive hesitation by cattle as they neared the stun box. The audit indicated the likelihood other slaughterhouses have problems, animal advocates say. "It shows abuses during a period of heightened awareness and the presence of USDA inspectors," Wayne Pacelle, CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, said.

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