

# The anatomy of a crisis and the veterinarian's role

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## Introduction

I didn't grow up too far from the farm in Indiana, but most of my information about farmers and farming came from going to the local farm to buy sweet corn and from my friends who were in 4-H.

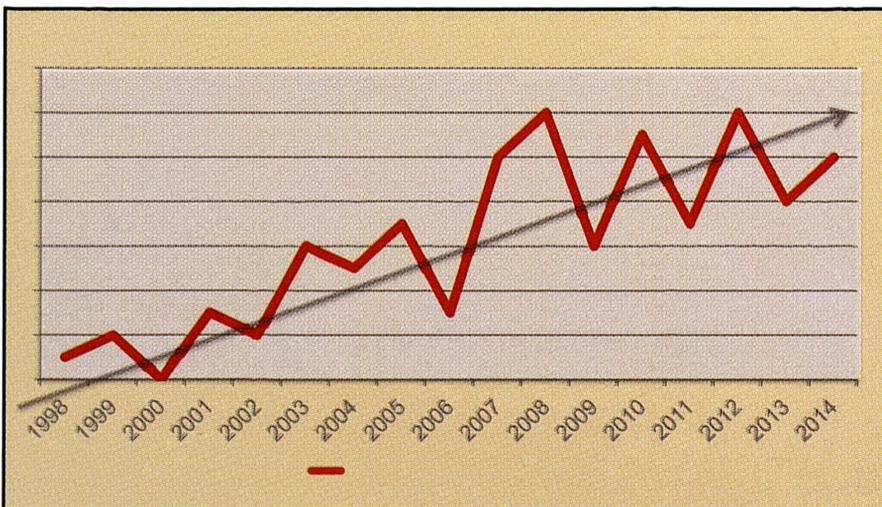
Today, it's a different story. I work with MorganMyers, a strategic communications firm that works specifically in the food and agricultural spaces – from farm to table. Our team has helped manage the communication around several of the more recent animal welfare challenges from a variety of perspectives – the brand, the cooperative/processor and the farmer. On a day-to-day basis, I oversee the public relations activity for Merck Animal Health across species, and I work closely with their dairy team rolling out the new Dairy C.A.R.E. initiative. I have been around the country conducting Dairy CARE workshops, and everywhere I go, I make sure to get myself on a dairy or calf ranch. I've learned a lot and gained a great deal of perspective. Some of the material I'll share with you today is part of that program.

**Key words:** cattle, animal rights, activists

## Anatomy of a Crisis

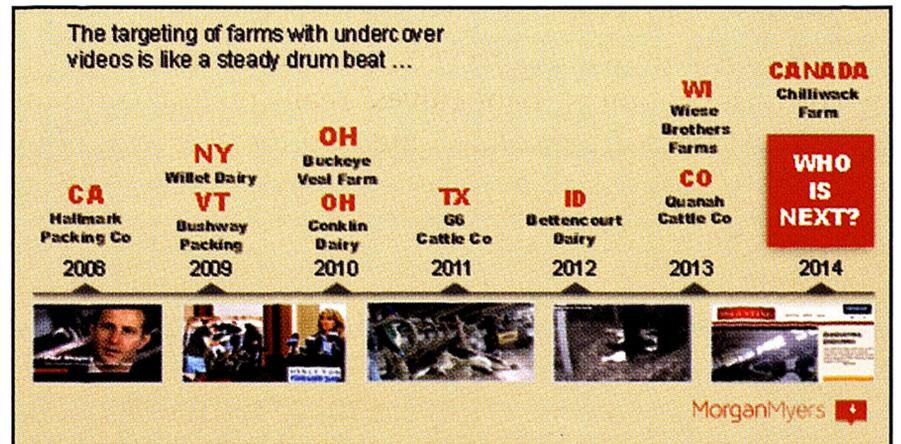
You've heard about what happens when an undercover video investigation takes place on a farm from Gary Conklin and Dr. Palmer. I'm sure there's no doubt in your minds right now that these situations are grave and upsetting to the farmers involved – they are shocked by what they see in the video. They're also disruptive to business and represent a significant cost to the farmer emotionally, financially and to their brand reputations. It can take a year ... or more to recover. These stories often live on in the news.

Growing number of investigations



We know what the landscape is in animal agriculture. The number of video investigations each year continues to grow. What started as one or two videos per year on poultry operations has now climbed to one every other month or so.

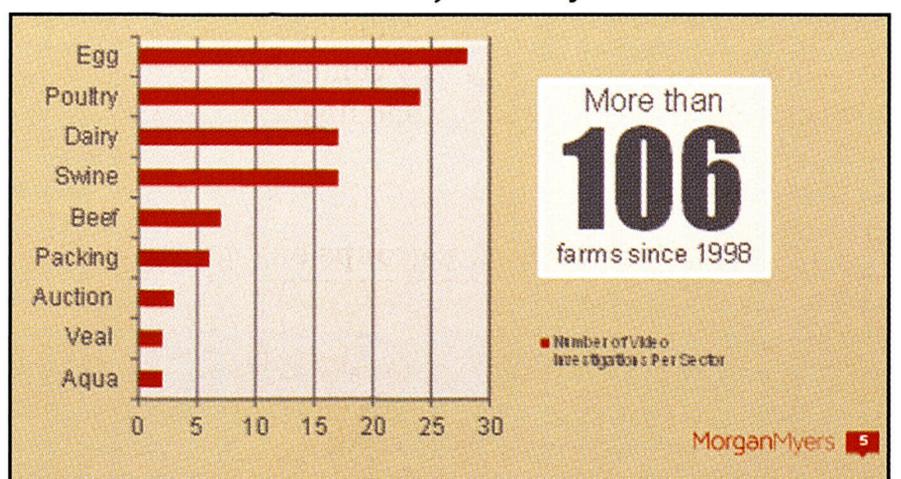
## Dairy farmers under attack



These aren't just one-off, isolated events. They are a steady drumbeat of images and messages to consumers designed to expose consumers to what the activists would call the "dark side" of animal agriculture in an attempt to convince them that something is wrong and something needs to change.

We know that today they are on someone's farm somewhere and we have to ask ourselves, "Who's next?"

## It's not just dairy



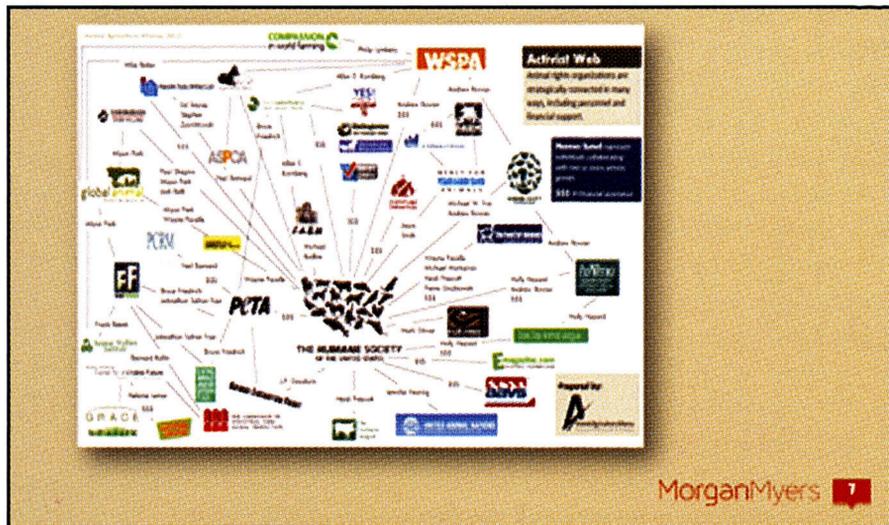
The shocking number is the one you see here on the screen. Over the past 15 years there have been over 106 undercover video investigations across the country. And, it's not just egg and poultry operations, but swine, beef and dairy – even aqua.

### No one is immune



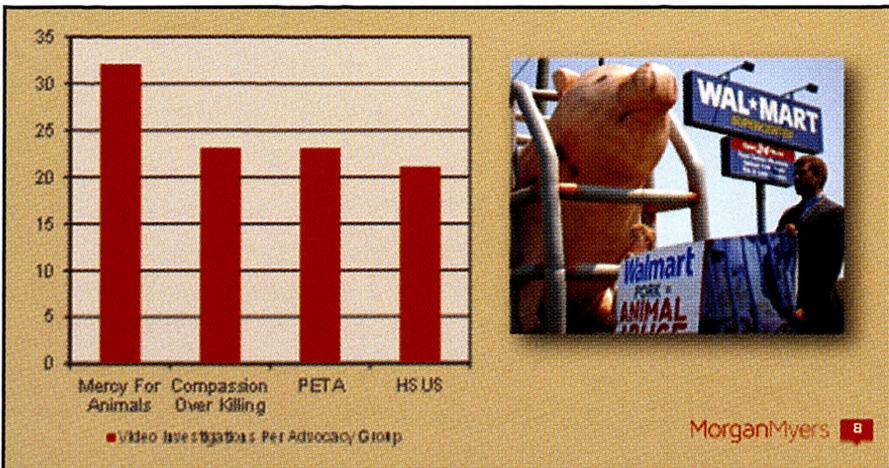
No one is immune ... packers, dairy farmers, beef or calf ranches. The notion of “baby calves” really pulls at consumers’ heart strings. The bottom line: if there are employees and animals, there is risk.

### NGOs: Organized, coordinated effort



Clearly, it is an organized effort and there are a lot of activist groups. As you can see by this chart from the Animal Ag Alliance, they are strategically connected in many ways, and they often share personnel and financial support.

### Multiple advocacy groups engaged



There are four primary groups that utilize the undercover video approach: Mercy for Animals, Compassion Over Killing, PETA and the Humane Society of the United States. What I think is interesting to know is the annual operating budgets of each of these groups. HSUS = \$181 million; PETA = \$37 million; MFA gets quite a bit done with = \$2.5 million and Compassion Over Killing = \$1 million. They raise this money by running advertisements and sending out mailings that show sad puppies and kittens. Their combined annual operating budgets total \$221 million dollars that they have available to them every year, and certainly a portion of that is used to target farms that you serve to ultimately advance their agenda to eliminate animal agriculture and move toward a vegan society.

### NGO strategies

1. Raise concerns over permits for new or expanded farms in rural communities
2. Build support for legislative efforts to change on-farm practices
3. Pursue new policies related to environmental protection or water resources
4. Force regulatory action
5. Cast doubt on common agricultural practices through the media
6. Target national brands to force on-farm changes throughout the supply chain

There are a number of strategies that the activists use to undermine the public’s confidence in farmers and farm practices. They raise concerns over permits for new or expanded farms in rural communities. They build support for legislative efforts to change on-farm practices. They pursue new policies related to environmental protection or water resources. They try to force regulatory action. But the most effective method of trying to impact change throughout the supply change is through these undercover video campaigns that target the big branded food companies.

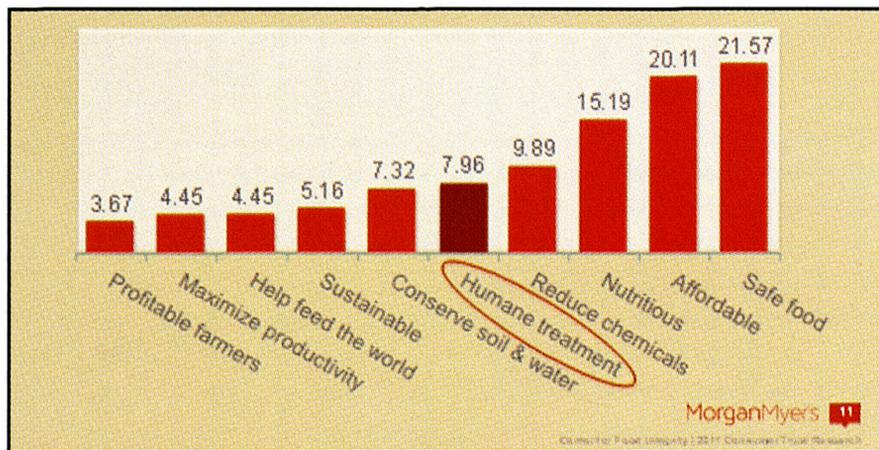
### The focus is the brand



These brands are the real target. NGOs have discovered that if they put pressure on the big brand to change their animal well-being policies ... they can effectively change the on-farm animal well-being standards overnight for thousands of farm suppliers and put peer pressure on other brands to do the same.

It can be a grave situation for your clients as they could lose their markets for meat and milk – literally overnight.

### Erosion of Consumer Trust



From farm to table, the consumer's dinner table is the end game and drives the brand. We see a lot of consumer research, and a very consistent theme is the importance of animal well-being to consumers. It is ranked in the top five attributes of what's important to consumers when they make food purchasing choices.

- Is it safe?
- Can I afford it?
- Is it nutritious?
- Is it full of chemicals?
- Were the animals treated humanely?

That's something we didn't see in research 5 or 10 years ago.

### Tracing the farm to the brand

**Cruelty Campaign Demands**

1. Change or adopt new animal well-being policy in the supply chain
2. Disassociate with the farm
3. Or, BOTH!

**What is the "BIG BRAND" to do?**  
Reputation = Existence ...

During an undercover campaign,

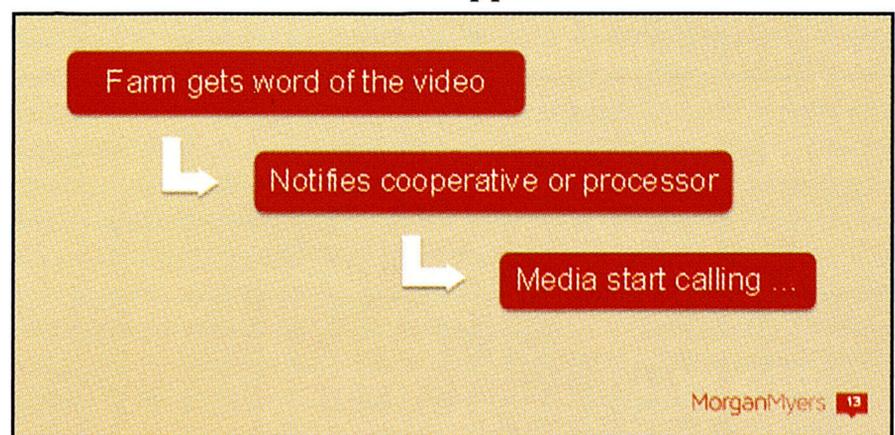
- Undercover activist gets hired on a farm

- Using a pin hole camera they capture video footage all day long for days, weeks, months at a time
- They collect enough "material" to then package it up to share it with local law enforcement

**AT THE SAME TIME**, the activists have traced the farm to one or more big brand food companies, who they contact with the video and threaten to launch a "Cruelty Campaign" if the big brand doesn't create new supply chain policies for animal welfare. Among other things, they may demand that the brand adopts new animal well-being policies in their supply chains or disassociate with the farm – OR BOTH!

Again, the target is the brand – putting pressure on the brand to change animal well-being policies is easier than passing legislation. What is the BIG BRAND to do? Their reputation with consumers is what keeps them in business.

### How it happens...



As you've heard from George and Gary ... the farmer is unaware.

- They first know when they get a call from the authorities, or from the activist – or even their cooperative/processor that a video has been taken.
- They might get a few days notice before the video is released to the media, which gives us time to figure out what's going on and prepare – or they might not.
- As we heard from Dr. Palmer, the farm's customers and industry representatives might get a call or letter/email, too – remember, the activists are working both ends of the food chain here – they are not just focused on the farm, but are focused on the big brand in order to affect change by leveraging this opportunity to reach **consumers**.
- Then quite honestly, the next thing that happens is the phones start ringing. It's reporters. They may even show up on the farm with camera crews without notice.

## The result?

**Cruelty Campaign**

1. News release with video footage
2. Press conference
3. Website and social media posts
4. Online petition

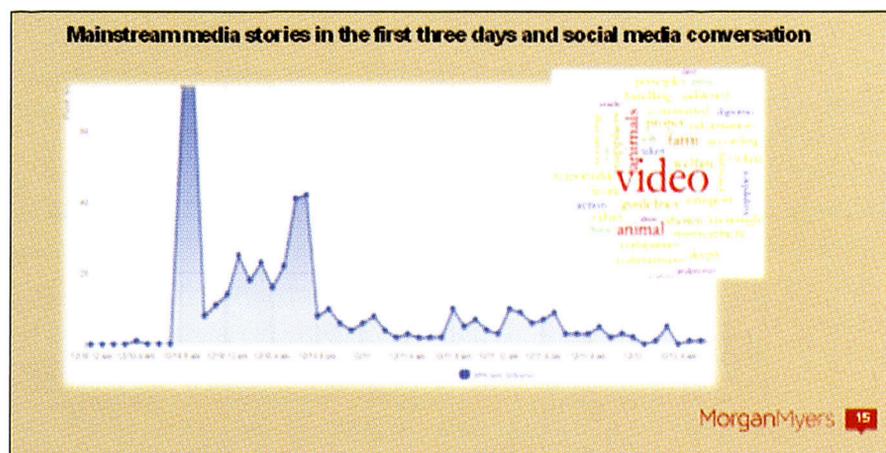


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All of this activity creates a period of chaos while everyone tries to figure out what's going on. Without fail, even if the big brand changes policies or disassociates with the farm, the activists launch their campaign anyway. ALWAYS. This campaign will include:

- News release with video footage
- Press conferences in major cities
- Posting the news on their websites
- Creating an online petition

## Life of a crisis



In our experience, these crises last around three days to a week.

It's going to be very HOT for at least three days – and the story can live on in the news for a year.

The chart on the left shows the number of mainstream media stories over the first three days. Where you see spikes, is where new information is released – arrests made, charges filed, appearances before the grand jury, etc.

There is also a word cloud on the right showing a summary of comments in social media about the alleged animal abuse video. In today's electronic world, everyone is a reporter/commentator and in a matter of seconds – literally – people are voicing their opinions about what happened on your customer's farm. They may live half way around the world, but they have an opinion and are talking about the story.

## Slice of cruelty campaign



Four workers at a Wisconsin dairy farm that is in the supply chain for DiGiorno's Pizza (owned by Nestlé) were charged with 11 counts of criminal animal cruelty...

ABC News



**MERCY FOR ANIMALS**

"We praise law enforcement for taking swift action and pursuing justice for these abused animals."

Matt Rice, director of investigations at Mercy for Animals



**Nestlé**

"In January we launched a new strenuous audit program in the U.S. that targets our direct supplies as well as others who do business with or provide ingredients to our direct suppliers."

Hannah Coan, Nestlé spokesperson

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Let's look at an undercover video investigation on a dairy farm in December of 2013 where this strategy to reach the brand was employed. Mercy for Animals launched what they called a "Slice of Cruelty" campaign. Why? Because the brand they were targeting was DiGiorno Pizza owned by Nestle ... the dairy supplied milk for the cheese that tops the brand's frozen pizza.

- The top band shows how the story played on ABC News. The farm isn't mentioned until the second paragraph – the lead goes straight to the brand.
- The second band shows how Mercy for Animals aligned with local law enforcement praising them for their swift action to help the animals.
- At the bottom you see Nestlé's response. Nestle asks the processor to drop the farm, and the farm loses its milk market. Nestle, announces a new layer of audits to reach farther down its supply chain following the release of the video.

## Target Nestlé



**FORTUNE**

**Nestlé vows to improve animal welfare after dairy cow abuse**

According to Mercy For Animals investigations director Matt Rice, the initial investigation in Wisconsin uncovered a farm worker kicking, beating and even stabbing cows at a farm that provided dairy for DiGiorno Pizza, a Nestlé company. That investigation led to arrests, and to Nestlé meeting with the MFA representatives.

**Nestlé Announces Farm Animal Welfare Commitment**

- Pledges to improve the welfare of farm animals in the supply chain
- Signs partnership agreement with World Animal Protection
- Hundreds of thousands of farms must comply with tighter animal welfare standards

Nestlé, with its global purchasing footprint, becomes the first major food company to form an international partnership with an animal welfare NGO.

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Fast forward eight months – the story lives on. What you see on the left is the story that appeared in FORTUNE in August. While Nestle may have been on a path to introduce their new animal welfare intentions, chances are this campaign provided a little pressure on the brand. On the right is the press release from Nestle announcing the brand's new "farm animal welfare commitment." According the news release from Nestle, the agreement means that hundreds of

thousands of farms that supply Nestle with their dairy, meat, poultry and eggs will have to comply with tighter animal welfare standards.

This is a ground-breaking event. Nestle is a global brand and they joined forces with World Animal Protection, a global animal rights group. This is REAL. This is happening. It didn't take legislation ... it only took a global brand. Why? It's all about consumer trust and brand reputation. It clearly demonstrates the potential far-reaching impact of such a campaign.

[http://fortune.com/2014/08/21/nestle-vows-to-improve-animal-welfare-after-dairy-cow-abuse/?utm\\_content=buffer03069&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](http://fortune.com/2014/08/21/nestle-vows-to-improve-animal-welfare-after-dairy-cow-abuse/?utm_content=buffer03069&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

### Nestlé implements change

- Space requirements for the rearing pens of certain species of animals, such as pigs and cows, to ensure they are not cramped and can engage in normal animal behavior
- Minimize pain for farm animals by using veterinary practices that reduce pain or avoid the practices in the first place, such as dehorning of cows
- Independent audits to ensure the new standards are met on supply farms
- If a company is unable or unwilling to show improvement, it will no longer supply Nestlé
- By the end of 2015, 40% of key commodities including meat, poultry, eggs and dairy will be fully traceable

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Nestle introduced their new “commitment to animal welfare” standards for their supply chains, and as a result, the BRAND is mandating things like space for housing animals, **veterinary practices** including pain management, standard agricultural practices, like dehorning, and they are auditing farms themselves. We know producers who said Nestle used to never come on the farm. Now they are there. And, if the farm doesn't like it or won't comply? They won't be a supplier to Nestle.

We have to ask ourselves – “do we want to put policies and procedures in place with regard to animal care and drive the change up to brand – or, do we want the brand to drive the change down to the farm?”



Let's watch how this played on the news ... This story is a good example of how group speaks from their own perspective – the cooperative/processor and the brand.

### After the video:

And the farmer stands alone. In these situations, we work very hard to keep everyone on the same page. We don't want the farmer to lose his milk market. But at the end of the day, the brand calls the shots. They wield the power because they MUST retain consumer confidence.



So, let's transition to what you can do to help your clients be proactive to avoid finding themselves in this situation – and it can be done. Many, if not all of you, are looking to add value on the farm with your clients. There are many things you can do to help your clients be proactive and to prepare so that they protect their animals and their businesses.

They can and should be putting policies and procedures in place to make sure their employees know what their expectations are for handling the animals – and making sure they are properly trained. We also want to help you prepare yourself and understand the role you can play with your clients in the heat of the moment if they ever face a challenge.

### Define expectations for animal care

- Outline an animal care commitment
- Align employees behind it – they must read and sign
- Hold employees to standards of care
- Share with anyone who handles animals
- Share with visitors and the community

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The first step is foundational – it is the animal care commitment and is simple to develop. It outlines a farmer’s expectations for how he/she wants the animals handled and cared for. The documents I’m showing on the following screens are part of Merck Animal Health’s Dairy CARE initiative that includes templates for creating on-farm policies and procedures. Available in English and Spanish, these documents could be used on beef or dairy farms as well as calf ranches.

- The animal care commitment should be shared with all employees who are required to read and sign it.
- They should be held to these standards of care. For example, the animal care commitment could also outline repercussions for not conforming to these standards of care.
- The animal care commitment can be reviewed regularly during employee meetings and anytime a new employee is hired.
- Farmers should share their animal care commitment with anyone who comes onto the farm – the milk hauler, those who pick up the calves, etc., who can also be required to sign it. In this way, EVERYONE knows what the expectations are. It can also be shared with those in the community so everyone knows what your client stands for.

In the heat of a crisis, your clients can point to this commitment that documents what they believe in terms of animal care.

### Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) Outline HOW

- SOPs support the animal care commitment
- Outline HOW animals should be cared for
- SOP for non-ambulatory cow
- SOP for euthanasia
- Train, train and retrain
- Avoid procedural drift

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- The next step is making sure your clients have written SOPs that outline HOW the animals should be cared for. This is an ideal place for you to help your clients.
- We hear lots of stories – “I don’t have time to write down my SOPs” – “I don’t need SOPs,” etc.
- While the animal care commitment outlines the expectation for animal care, SOPs outline exactly how that care should be delivered.

- Two of the most important SOPs a farm can have are an SOP for euthanasia and an SOP for handling the non-ambulatory cow. Why? The down cow is always at the center of an undercover video. Making sure there is a plan in place for moving the down cow – and making sure employees are trained to do it is vital.
- Again, SOPs are something that should be reviewed regularly to avoid procedural drift. It’s that drift that can lead to incorrect animal handling.

### Animal Handling Training

- Provide regular on-farm training
  - Dairy Care365™
  - Creating Connections
  - Beef Cattle Institute (Kansas State University)
  - Beef Quality Assurance (NCBA)
  - FARM Program (NMPF)
- Document/certification of the training
- Train, retrain and review

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The animal care commitment outlines the expectations for animal care, the SOPs outline how and making sure employees are properly trained is the next step. Train, train and re-train – this is vital to ensuring the animals are being handled properly and a place where you can play a key role.

There are many programs available that you and your clients can use, as you know.

1. Merck Animal health has video animal handling training modules through Dairy Care365 and Creating Connections.
2. The Beef Cattle Institute through Kansas State University and the great work of Dr. Dan Thompson and Dr. Tom Noffsinger. These animal handling/training resources are available to all of you who are members of AABP.
3. The Beef Quality Assurance program through NCBA.
4. And, the National Milk Producers Federation offers guidelines and materials through the FARM program.

There are many more resources, of course, that I haven’t mentioned that you are likely aware of that are also good. The bottom line is making sure employees are properly trained is key, as is making sure you certify those employees and document the training.

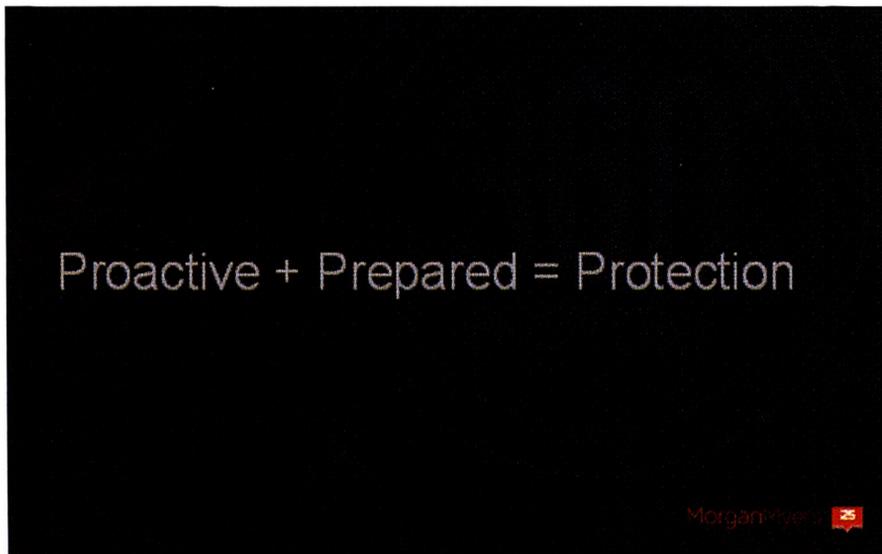
## You can't manage what you don't measure

- Drop in occasionally without prior notice
- Walk the barns and check on the animals and employees
- Require immediate reporting of mismanagement
- Consider video surveillance



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As the saying goes, “you can’t manage what you don’t measure. Encourage your clients to drop in unexpectedly and walk the barns – observe the animals and the employees. Help them put a plan in place to encourage employees to report any mismanagement immediately. Video surveillance is one tool that can also help identify any animal handling issues.



The last step of proactively getting prepared involves putting together a crisis preparedness plan – in advance. There are lots of sayings to support preparation – “prepare for the worst – hope for the best,” or “the best offense is a good defense” – the bottom line is you will save valuable time later if you prepare in advance.

A crisis comes in many forms on the farm – it could be a fire, a weather related emergency, a manure spill or a herd health epidemic. And, a crisis response plan is something most producers don’t have – and many times feel they don’t need. But, again, just like you heard from Gary and Dr. Palmer, the crisis unfolds quickly and can leave farmers reeling in an attempt to deal with the situation at hand.

## Laying the groundwork...what would I do?

### Things to help your clients consider:

- What constitutes a crisis for them?
- When will they implement the crisis plan?
- Who will be in charge?
- Who is on their response team?
- In case of an emergency ... how will they notify the team?
- Who is responsible for what?
- Where will the team meet in the event of an issue?
- Who is authorized to speak? Is the spokesperson trained?
- Is messaging developed?

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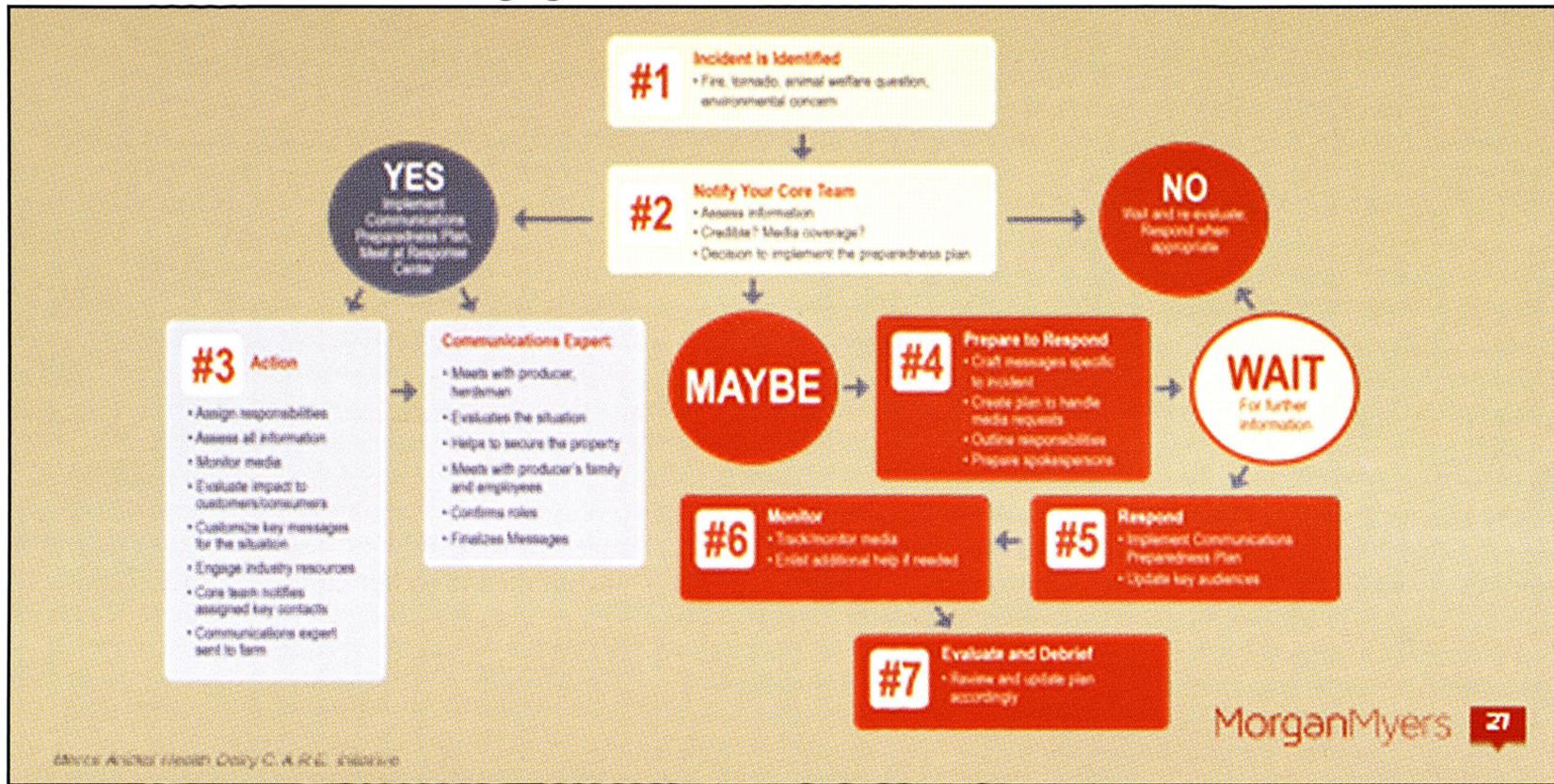
Preparation is the key to avoiding a crisis in the first place – and makes it easier to manage the details if all else fails and a crisis occurs. You don’t want to wake up one day to 975 phone calls without a plan for dealing with them.

There are many things to help your clients consider:

1. What do they consider a crisis?
2. When will they implement the plan?
3. Who will be in charge? – the person in charge of a manure spill may not be the person in charge when the crisis is a herd health epidemic.
4. Who will be on their response team? Who do they trust most to give them advice? You as the veterinarian should be on that response team. Maybe their attorney and a trusted family member. In a crisis, the person at the center of the crisis could be in shock. It’s important to have these things thought out in advance so someone with a clear head is in charge.
5. How will they notify the team in case of an emergency?
6. Who will be responsible for what? (Notifying customers and suppliers; collaborating with industry leaders; informing employees; answering the phone; monitoring the media. The list goes on and on.)
7. Where will the response team meet?
8. Who is the spokesperson? Is the spokesperson trained? Is messaging developed?

**It’s important to have these things in place ... if you haven’t thought about these things, now is the time.**

## Communications Flow Chart—managing the crisis



When the crisis hits, this is what you're going to be managing. These are all the steps that we take, the decisions we are making, the strategies we are developing and what we are managing when a crisis strikes, from the time it's identified until it is over.

Give examples:

- Sometimes we say NO. It's definitely not a crisis. Maybe there was a fire – but there was not loss of life.
- Sometimes it's a maybe: McDonald's food tampering example.
- Sometimes, it's an immediate yes: Video – you know it's a crisis and you implement the plan.

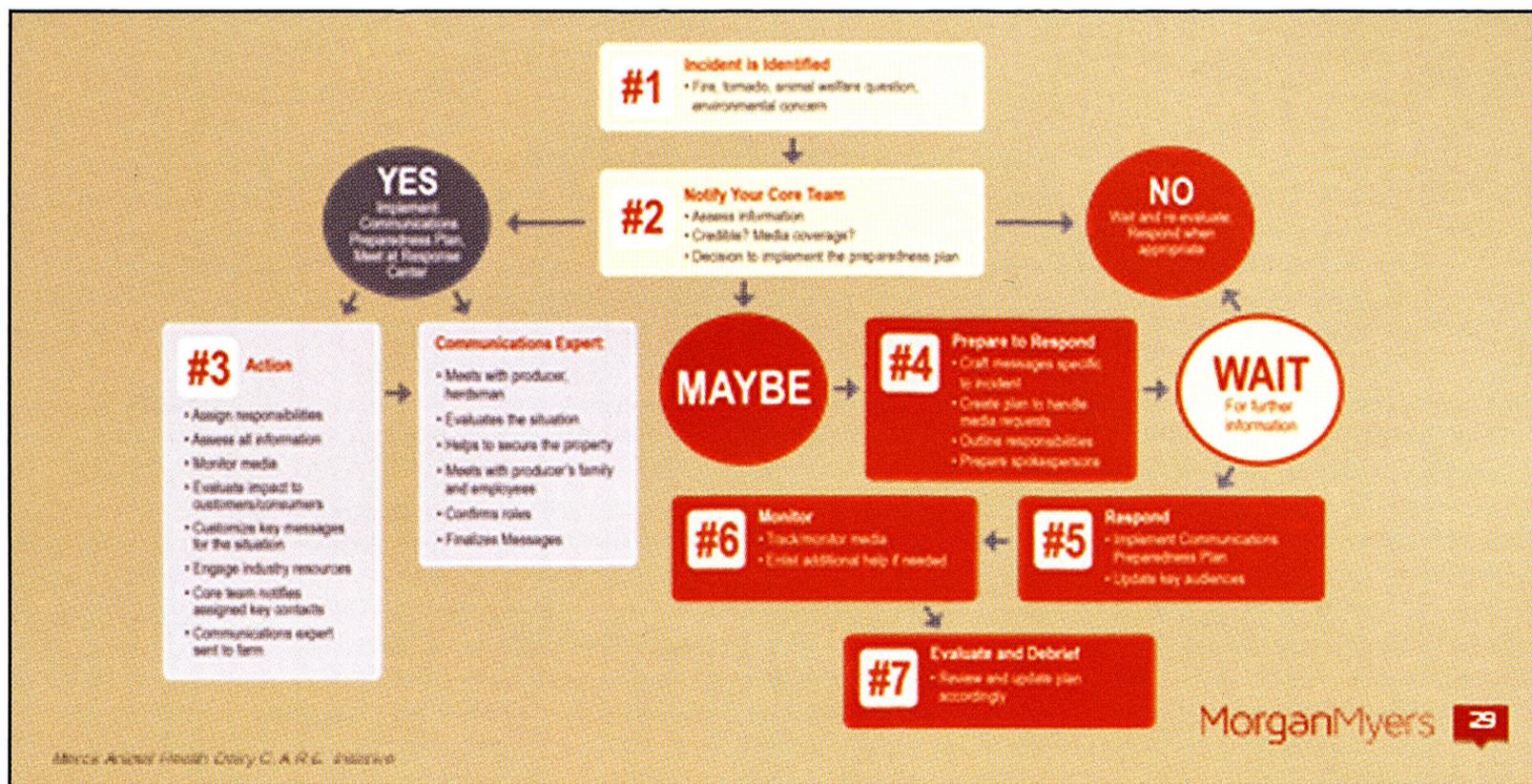
### Developing a plan

- Create key contacts list with emergency numbers
- Identify a core response team
- Assign responsibilities
- Develop a plan to secure the property
- Draft key messages
- Designate spokesperson and make sure they are trained

- Create a key contacts list – this is one of the simplest steps that is often overlooked, but can save valuable time in the heat of the moment. It should include the response team, the cooperative or processor, milk hauler, cull cow market. It should also key employees, local officials and industry associations along with any media contacts you may have.
- Identify a core response team for each scenario. As I said before, the person in charge of a manure spill may not be the same person in charge of a herd health epidemic. Given your extensive knowledge of animal agriculture and trustworthiness to the general public, you play a key role on the response team.
- Assign responsibilities for monitoring the media, answering the phone, communicating with employees, collaborating with industry and key stakeholders, informing customers and suppliers.
- Have a plan to secure the property.
- Draft key messages.
- Designate a spokesperson and make sure he/she is media trained – one of the spokespeople could be you, and we'll talk about that in a few minutes.
- Make sure your client's train their employees on the plan and know what to do, what not to do and who to call.

Help your clients develop a preparedness plan. Again, there is a template for this in the Merck Animal Health Dairy CARE initiative. Start by brainstorming the situations that would constitute a crisis for them – that would call for implementing the plan.

## In the heat of the moment



**In the heat of the moment, you can quickly become overwhelmed.** The phone is ringing, you're dealing with employees and customers, industry members and perhaps the authorities. Having a crisis plan in place with the details figured out in advance will help you focus on doing what is most important first because you are following a plan you have already laid out.

### In the heat of the moment—RESPOND QUICKLY

**Respond quickly ... Immediate steps**

- Call the response team and implement the plan
- Draft key messages and a statement
- Work with spokesperson on Q&A
- Maintain log of phone calls
- Ensure a constant flow of information to affected audiences



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You'll need to respond quickly. Once you've made the decision to implement the plan, you can pull together your key messages and a statement. If you have developed key messages in advance, you will only need to modify them to fit the situation at hand, which saves a lot of time.

- Work with your spokesperson on Q&A.
- Maintain a log of phone calls and get people the information they need. The WORST thing you can do is to stop the flow of information, which gives your audiences room to speculate.

### In the heat of the moment—CRITICAL INFORMATION

**Information that must be communicated in a critical situation:**

- Who was involved – and who was at the scene
- What happened, where it happened, when it happened, why it happened, and how it happened
- Your role in the critical situation
- What you are doing about the situation
- How you are controlling the situation
- How you are keeping people/animals safe

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In any crisis situation, the story is HOT. There is critical information that must be shared, and in the world of journalism, we refer to those as the 5 W's and the H. What happened, who was involved, how did it happen, what was YOUR role, and what are you doing about it – how are you keeping people and animals safe?

### In the heat of the moment—KEY MESSAGES

- Acknowledge the problem
- Take responsibility
- Outline steps being taken
- Explain that you're cooperating with authorities
- Show your commitment to animal well-being on the farm
- Demonstrate your determination to move beyond this situation

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When you are communicating critical information, key messages and your statement are extremely important. In that statement, your client should:

1. Acknowledge the problem and take responsibility (it's his farm no matter what the issue is)
2. Explain the steps that are being taken to remedy the situation
3. If the authorities are involved, let the audience know that your client is cooperating
4. Demonstrate the commitment to animal well-being on the farm and your determination to move beyond the situation. You may not have all the answers today – but you're working on it.

### Serving as spokesperson

- Extensive knowledge of the farm
  - Animal care commitment
  - SOPs
  - Employee training
- Held in high esteem by consumers and general public
- High level of credibility

*"We are the spokespeople for the cows."*



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As Dr. Palmer demonstrated, as veterinarians, you are in a unique position to be the spokesperson for the farm. Who better?

- You are intimately involved with the farm on a regular basis and know how they care for their animals, what their SOPs are and how they train their employees.
- You are held in high esteem by consumers and the general public and are highly credible.
- In the heat of the moment, your client may not be able to speak – they're dealing with a lot and may not be in an emotional place to respond, either.
- I was media training in California and had a big group of young, earnest veterinarians just a few years out of school. One young gal said in a mock interview, "As veterinarians, we are the spokespeople for the cows." It was perfect!

### Proactive + Prepared = Protection

**Proactive + Prepared**

- Animal Care Commitment Statement
- SOPs
- Animal handling training
- Preparedness plan
- In the heat of the moment
  - Respond quickly
  - Communicate critical information
  - Serve as spokesperson



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### Conclusions

We've covered a lot of ground today beginning with the landscape in animal agriculture and the importance of aligning with consumer expectations. Farmers are food producers and consumer perception is as important to them as it is to the branded food companies.

Helping your clients proactively put the policies and procedures in place related to the care and well-being of their animals is foundational and making sure their employees are properly trained is critical. This could very well avoid a crisis in the first place in the form of an animal welfare challenge.

We've also talked a lot about the crisis itself – why it happens and how it happens along with what to do when it happens and how to respond. Hopefully you've learned something today that you can take back to your practices and the farms you serve.