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Breaking: Undercover investigation exposes public health threats, fraud, and cruelty connected to dairy industry

New video of an undercover investigation at Erath County Dairy Sales in Texas reveals cruelty and criminal activity in the dairy and live animal auction industries that directly impacts the safety of our food system



(Dublin, TX - October 15, 2020) - A new undercover investigation has unveiled a previously unknown, harrowing practice in dairy sales auctions: the illegal removal and replacement of cows' ID tags, essentially erasing their histories in order to increase profits by mislabeling the cows as organic. In addition to committing fraud and misleading consumers, the removal of these ID tags poses a severe threat to human health, as the diseases traced by the tags could potentially be at the center of a zoonotic or food-borne illness outbreak.

View the [full video here](#).

The eight-week undercover investigation, released today, was conducted by Strategies for Ethical and Environmental Development ([SEED](#)) from Jan, 24 to March 13 at Erath County Dairy Sales in Dublin, Texas, which buys cows from dairy farms across the country and sells

them to the meat industry nationwide, including to major beef producers such as JBS and FPL Foods. In addition to systemic cruelty and animal abuse, the investigator uncovered criminal activity that directly impacts the safety of our food system.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's [animal disease traceability system](#) mandates identification tags be applied to cattle traveling interstate and not be removed. This is because when populations of animals from across the country are mixed together, as they are in live animal auctions, it is important to be able to track contagions by knowing each animal's disease, travel and ownership history. This is especially important because cows have been linked to outbreaks of anthrax, mad cow disease and tuberculosis. And experts predict that industrial animal agriculture will directly cause the next global pandemic, in addition to pushing us ever closer to a society with widespread antibiotic resistance. Despite all of this, SEED's undercover investigation repeatedly documented the illegal removal and replacement of cows' ID tags, essentially erasing their histories in order to increase profits by mislabeling the cows as "organic."

Though cows' natural lifespans would normally go to upwards of fifteen to twenty years, most dairy industry cows are classified as "spent" and sent to auction when they're around three to five years old. This includes sick and injured cows, who regularly die during transport or within hours of arrival. At auction sites, sick, injured, and dying cows are kept with healthy animals, creating conditions where diseases spread rapidly.

Each year, between 2 and 4 million young cows are labeled "spent" and leave the dairy industry to be slaughtered for beef. When their tags are switched, it's impossible to track disease origins, or how poorly they have been treated, or whether they can actually be called certified organic.

Additional video evidence can be [found at this link](#).

The most frequent and compelling type of animal cruelty witnessed by the SEED investigator was severe neglect, including sick cows being left to suffer for long periods of time without veterinary treatment or euthanasia and cows and calves being left in pens for long periods of time with no access to food or water. Additionally, the investigator witnessed incidents of improper euthanasia, including employees attempting to euthanize cows with a rifle, requiring multiple attempts, sometimes with significant periods of time in between, during which cows were left amongst euthanized cows in what are known as "dead piles." Finally, the investigation revealed auction employees repeatedly shocking downed cows with electric prods, sometimes for multiple minutes at a time.

Cailen LaBarge, the co-founder of SEED, launched the organization and this investigation in an effort to dismantle capital-intensive, industrial animal agriculture and promote a just transition to a plant-based food system which supports and protects animals, people, and the planet.

"The fraudulent activity and the potential food safety consequences at the center of this case are just two of the harms imposed on animals and people by industrial animal agriculture. As consumers, we cannot isolate ourselves from the impacts of a food system dominated by cruelty. When we treat animals as mere production machines to be abused and thrown away, just as when we exploit farm and slaughterhouse workers, or allow companies to freely pollute without considering the effects upon our shared environment, we eventually bring harm upon ourselves. The dairy and meat industries cannot be uncoupled; we must reject them both if we want a healthy, sustainable, and equitable future," LaBarge said. "We need to understand that we're being fed a lie."

The full investigation overview can be accessed via SEED's [website](#). On March 27, 2020, SEED reported the Criminal Cruelty to Livestock Animals violations, Animal Disease Traceability program violations, and Packers & Stockyards Act violations to the USDA.

The undercover investigation's launch video is narrated by singer Mýa, produced by Asher Brown and Pollution.tv, and directed by acclaimed visual artist Tim Nackashi.

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About SEED

Strategies for Ethical and Environmental Development ([SEED](#)) is a new women-led nonprofit animal and environmental advocacy organization fighting for an equitable and ethical world for animals, people, and the planet. Their mission is to dismantle capital-intensive, industrial animal agriculture and promote a just transition which supports workers, small-scale farmers, traditional communities, respect for the natural world, the emancipation of people, and the liberation of animals. Their investigations use undercover and open source techniques to expose the many negative externalities of industrial animal agriculture. Learn more at www.seedundercoverinvestigations.com