

# Undercover at Pilgrim's Pride: A Humane Society of the United States investigation

**Undercover exposés by The HSUS have uncovered abuse in the supply chain of [Pilgrim's Pride](#)—the world's second largest chicken producer—including animals beaten with a metal rod and more.**

**In May 2017**, an HSUS undercover investigator worked at a slaughter facility in Mt. Pleasant, Texas owned by Pilgrim's Pride. And in June 2017, an HSUS undercover investigator worked at a Plainview Chicken Farm facility in Hull, Georgia that raises chickens under contract for Pilgrim's Pride. In 2017, Pilgrim's Pride has so far received \$20.5 million in federal contracts to supply chicken to federal programs.

[Here's a video](#) detailing the exposés, [here's media B-Roll](#) footage, and below are the complete findings.

## Georgia contract farm findings:

Plainview Farm houses approximately 126,000 chickens in several barns. During a matter of just several days, an HSUS investigator documented the following abusive acts and conditions:

- The owner of the farm bludgeoned chickens with a metal rod to make it easier for him to grab them.
- Sick and injured chickens had their necks twisted in crude attempts to kill them.
- Thousands of chickens were aggressively captured and slammed into cages for transport to slaughter.
- Chickens were grabbed by their necks and thrown through the air.
- As is the case throughout the poultry industry, the birds at Plainview are bred to grow extremely large, extremely fast. Severe leg problems resulting from this rapid, unhealthy growth were documented – including birds unable to walk to reach food and water.
- As is also the case throughout the poultry sector, birds were also severely overcrowded.
- Chicks died when they became trapped inside plastic duct tubing.
- A water leak caused soaked litter in a crowded barn, creating an unhealthy environment for birds.

Though all of the above represents abuse, the bludgeoning and throwing of chickens may be criminal-level abuse; The HSUS has filed the below complaint with the Madison County Sheriff's Department in Danielsville, Georgia, over those acts.

## Texas slaughterhouse findings:

[According to the company](#), this facility slaughters birds for the Pilgrim's, Country Pride, Gold Kist and Pierce Chicken brands, and serves "major retail, food service and casual dining customers."

- The HSUS investigator was tasked with handling live birds every day—shackling them by their legs on a fast-moving slaughter line. Despite the company's [website](#) claiming that its "employees who handle live birds are required to complete animal-welfare training," the investigator was provided zero animal welfare training during a full week of orientation; animal welfare was never even mentioned.
- The investigator witnessed birds being punched as they were immobilized in shackles, being violently slammed into shackles with unnecessary force, and being carelessly pitched into shackles from an inappropriate distance.
- The investigator also witnessed a worker repeatedly shackle and unshackle chickens—a violent act of cruelty that would cause extreme pain.

The punching and repeated shackling/unshackling of birds may be criminal-level abuse; The HSUS has filed the below complaint with the Titus County Sheriff's Office in Mt. Pleasant, Texas, over those acts.





**THE HUMANE SOCIETY**  
OF THE UNITED STATES

Celebrating Animals | Confronting Cruelty

June 19, 2017

John Livingston, Chief Deputy  
Titus County Sheriff's Office  
304 South Van Buren  
Mount Pleasant, TX 75455

**RE: Alleged Cruelty to Livestock Animals Complaint**  
**VIA Email: [jlivingston@co.titus.tx.us](mailto:jlivingston@co.titus.tx.us)**

**Note:**  
After this was filed,  
Deputy Livingston  
forwarded the  
complaint to  
Detective Ellis at the  
Mt. Pleasant, TX  
Police Department.

Dear Chief Deputy Livingston:

We are writing to bring your attention to two separate alleged acts of cruelty to livestock animals which we ask you to investigate under Texas Penal Code Title 9, Chapter 42, §42.09 (a)(1) (torture of a livestock animal).

The location of the two incidents at issue is the Pilgrim's Pride poultry slaughter plant at 1000 Pilgrim's Street in Mount Pleasant, Texas.

We have prepared a video link for you that shows Jesus Torres and Abraham Torres – both employees at Pilgrim's Pride – cruelly torturing broiler chickens in the "live hang" area of the plant. For the record, it is unknown to us whether Jesus Torres and Abraham Torres are related.

Incident #1: May 16, 2017 – alleged perpetrator Jesus Torres

Mr. Jesus Torres can be seen punching birds as they go by upside-down in metal leg shackles. For some reason unknown to us, chickens were not on the conveyor belt as they should be so workers could not hang them. Many shackles going by the workers are empty but when shackles are occupied by live birds, Mr. Torres strikes the birds hard with his fists. He can be seen striking already-hung birds at 00:14, 00:15, 00:31, 00:35, and 00:37. At 00:16 and 00:19 he can be seen violently jamming birds' legs into metal shackles with unnecessary force.

Incident #2: May 17, 2017 – alleged perpetrator Abraham Torres

Mr. Abraham Torres is seen torturing broiler chickens by repeatedly, unnecessarily and cruelly jamming the birds' legs into the metal shackles, throwing the birds at the shackles and generally mishandling them. The chickens are seemingly used to relieve boredom during a period of time when the live-hang line was stopped. The torture of the bird begins at 01:05 in the video and continues sporadically until 01:23. Then, at 01:35 the torture resumes when a bird is twice carelessly thrown at the metal shackles. At 02:16, Abraham Torres begins torturing a single chicken whose legs he repeatedly and violently jams into one shackle after the next until 02:46.

Chief Deputy John Livingston

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By the time broiler chickens reach the live-hang line, they have already been through the rigors of transport by truck crammed into cages in which they can hardly move, only to wait their turn – often in excessive heat or cold – to be dumped out of the crates onto a conveyor belt system. The entire ante-mortem poultry slaughter system is fraught with inherent cruelty. No bird wants to be hung upside down by the legs and dragged through electrified water where they are often inadequately stunned so that they feel the blade slice into the necks. Sometimes the chickens avoid both the stun bath and the neck blade which means they go into the scald tank fully conscious to drown while they are being scalded. Such birds are called “cadavers” by the USDA but are known as “red birds” in the industry vernacular since their still-beating hearts pump blood to the surface of their scalded flesh and make them unfit for sale. It is a sure thing that deliberate cruelties like those visited upon the birds by Jesus Torres and Abraham Torres as seen in our video should not be tolerated and that these men should be charged with cruelty to animals.

If your investigation into these incidents results in the decision to charge the alleged perpetrators, we will be more than happy to provide you the opportunity to interview the eyewitness videographer.

I can be reached at 802-394-2998. We look forward to hearing from you and will do our very best to cooperate with your investigation. Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

*Mary Beth Sweetland*

Mary Beth Sweetland

Senior Director of Investigations



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY**  
OF THE UNITED STATES

Celebrating Animals | Confronting Cruelty

June 26, 2017

J. Michael Moore  
Sheriff, Madison County  
1436 Highway 98 West  
Danielsville, GA 30633

RE: Cruelty to Animals Complaint  
Via email: [mmoore@madisonco.us](mailto:mmoore@madisonco.us)

Dear Sheriff Moore:

We are writing to make you aware of what we believe are violations of Georgia's Cruelty to Animals statute – Title 16, Chapter 12 §16-12-4.

The location of the alleged criminal acts is Plainview Farm, 625 Donald Smith Road, Hull, GA, a poultry (broiler) farm that grows chickens for Pilgrim's Pride. The alleged perpetrator is George Smith, the owner of Plainview Farm and its chief operator who we believe acted with malice and intent against animals on the farm.

We have prepared a video link for you which shows the following incidents that we believe constitute cruelty to 4 different animals:

On June 13, 2017, George Smith intentionally beat 2 chickens left behind by the catching crew that had cleaned out the barns that morning. Smith beat the birds with a heavy metal rod (a poultry catching pole) to make them easier to grab and then spun them by their necks – a method of killing which is not guaranteed to break their necks and which may prolong suffering. The method used to more quickly kill birds involves cervical dislocation – firmly grasping their legs and then pulling the head in a strong, quick upward motion to make sure the head is separated from the neck. (Scenes 1 and 2)

Sheriff Moore  
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On the same day, June 13, 2017, Mr. Smith grabbed 2 chickens by their necks and unnecessarily threw them into the remaining flock. (Scene 3)

If your investigation into these incidents results in the decision to charge the alleged perpetrator, we will be more than happy to provide you the opportunity to interview the eyewitness videographer.

I can be reached at 802-394-2998. We look forward to hearing from you and will do our very best to cooperate with your investigation. Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

*Mary Beth Sweetland*

Mary Beth Sweetland  
Senior Director of Investigations