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May 8, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts,

Like many others, I was shocked to learn of the failed animal welfare policies at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC) in Clay Center, Nebraska. As one of the nation's largest agricultural research facilities, USMARC should set the standard for animal welfare and maintain its accountability to taxpayers.

Legislation recently introduced in the Senate, the AWARE Act (S. 388), will require USMARC and other federally run agricultural research facilities to follow certain accountability and transparency provisions of the Animal Welfare Act. I ask that you support the AWARE Act to ensure that the research at USMARC meets the same benchmarks of other animal research facilities.

As you may know, in 1983 I introduced the Improved Standards for Laboratory Animals Act. That legislation, signed into law via the 1985 Farm Bill, amended the Animal Welfare Act to raise standards of care for animals in federally funded research. Among other provisions, the legislation mandated that all covered research facilities establish an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) to review research involving animals. As a result, these committees have become the standard arbiters of animal welfare oversight in private and academic research facilities.

Though not legally required to do so, USMARC instituted a voluntary policy to have its research reviewed by an IACUC. However, as revealed in the USDA's recent report, the facility's IACUC was negligent in its duties. According to the report, USMARC's IACUC did not know what its job was, did not adequately review or oversee animal research to ensure that it was humane, and did not meet regularly to discuss animal welfare.

Experiments conducted by the USDA—the agency with primary jurisdiction for enforcing federal animal protection statutes—should, at the very least, comply with the Animal Welfare Act, including its IACUC requirements and other accountability provisions. Passage of the AWARE Act will ensure that research under the USDA complies with the standards of the Animal Welfare Act and provides the necessary transparency to restore the public's confidence.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,


BOB DOLE