

Bonnie S. Klapper, Esq.
48 West 25th Street, Suite 600
New York, N.Y. 10010
bonniesklapper@bskesq.com
(516) 721-0010 (tel.)
(516) 921-2910 (fax)

Richard Ball
Commissioner
New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
12235, 10B Airline Drive
Albany, New York 12205
Commissioner@agriculture.ny.gov

March 30, 2020

Dear Commissioner Ball:

I write to you on behalf of Slaughter Free NYC and the people of the City of New York. Despite the Governor's impressive leadership, there is one very important issue that has not been addressed, an issue which falls directly within your area of responsibility. That issue is the existence, in the city hit hardest by the outbreak, of live markets and slaughterhouses that put every New Yorker, in fact everyone on the planet, at risk.

New York City is home to the highest population density in the country. It is now the city with the highest number of individuals infected with the COVID-19 virus in the United States and likely, the world. What very few people know is that New York City is ALSO home to the largest number of live animal/wet markets in the country. Most New Yorkers are shocked to learn that there are [more than 80 storefront slaughterhouses in New York City](#), located in all five boroughs.

What are these markets? They are storefront slaughterhouses, the majority open to the public, allowing members of the community to enter, purchase a live animal and have it slaughtered on the spot. Anyone can enter these wet markets, without any protective gear, and walk amongst the tightly confined animals, selecting the animal they wish to have slaughtered. These markets/slaughterhouses slaughter approximately 20 million animals within the city limits each year, spanning at least 10 species of domesticated animals, including chickens, ducks, lambs, goats and bulls.

What is equally surprising is that these city storefront slaughterhouses are predominantly located in residential neighborhoods. They frequently spill blood, guts, body parts, feces and other noxious materials on to public sidewalks and streets. Passersby then step in and track these materials all over the city, on to the subways, into their homes and beyond city limits.

These slaughterhouses are by no means essential; none of them are in food deserts and all of the areas in which they are located have grocery stores and/or bodegas. Nor are they less costly; in fact, purchasing meat at the supermarket is less expensive than purchasing meat at these slaughterhouses.

A common misconception is that zoonotic diseases like COVID-19 are spread from wildlife to humans, but the reality is that many zoonotic diseases originate in farm animals and are transmitted to humans. Avian flu originated in chickens; mad cow disease was transmitted to humans who consumed diseased cows. Anthrax came from cows, syphilis from sheep, H1N1 swine flu from pigs, salmonella, E.coli from a variety of animals. As a result, every one of these markets is a potential disease vector.

To get these animals to New York City, transporters pack the animals tightly into metal trailers, with holes on all sides, and transport them for upwards of 24 hours in all weather conditions - from extreme heat to below-freezing temperatures. During this grueling journey, they are deprived of food and water, and forced to stand in their own urine, feces, and vomit. They are transported on New York State roads and highways. Animals frequently die along the way from illness, dehydration, stress or injuries. Any pathogens present - from factory farm through transport - have the chance to spread once they arrive and are immediately packed into the NYC live slaughter markets

The NYC Department of Health and the city government claim they have no regulatory authority of these markets, despite the fact that their existence violates dozens of health codes, zoning and nuisance regulations. The city passes the buck to the State of New York, specifically your department, the NY State Department of Agriculture and Markets, which "regulates" these markets and licenses them. The reality is quite different. Absent a complaint made directly to the Department of Agriculture and Markets, these wet markets are not inspected. Residents have filed complaints, called their local representatives and reported to animal cruelty to the police

when appropriate. The only time any of these live markets is inspected is when a resident makes a complaint. On the rare occasion that an inspection takes place, the slaughterhouse owner is served with a notice of violation. Fines are rarely issued, license are not revoked, and repeat offenders are not punished.

Because of the manner in which animals are transported into the city, because of the manner in which they are confined and slaughtered, because of the way the waste generated by these markets is disposed of, every slaughterhouse is a major health hazard to the city's and the state's residents.

The failure of the Governor's Office, the Department of Agriculture and Markets, the Mayor and the city Department of Health to, at a minimum, suspend the operation of these slaughterhouse markets is incomprehensible. As the state and the city deal with the horrific consequences of the uncontained spread of COVID-19, they have left open wet markets which can be the source of even more zoonotic viruses. We call upon you, Commissioner Ball, and upon Governor Cuomo, Mayor Di Blasio, the Department of Agriculture and Markets and the city Department of Health to suspend the operation of these slaughterhouses immediately. To do otherwise is to knowingly put millions of state and city residents at risk.

The Governor's efforts to protect our state and city, while significant, have left this gaping loophole. Please take this one additional step. The people of New York are depending on you.

Very truly yours,



Bonnie S. Klapper