



Electroshocks, punching, and beatings: the life of cows turned into meat at JBS

By Piero Locatelli. Photos by Márcio Isensee e Sá and Piero Locatelli

Cattle ranches that supply JBS contradict the company's advertising about animal welfare and run counter to the recommendations of the Ministry of Agriculture.

A calf is branded on the face with a hot iron in Mato Grosso, bulls are electroshocked to make them get on a truck in Goiás, an animal is beaten while walking across the stockyard, and a newborn is dragged by the neck in Mato Grosso do Sul.

Scenes like these were documented by Repórter Brasil at ranches that supply cattle to JBS—the biggest producer of animal protein in the world and owner of companies such as Friboi and Swift. These practices violate the animal-welfare policies established by JBS itself. Additionally, the treatment of the cows does not follow the recommendations of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Provision (MAPA) on this subject.

In order to ascertain how the cattle ranches that supply JBS treat their animals, Repórter Brasil went to four different states between December 2015 and February 2016. The locations visited are listed on a website that belongs to JBS called *Con ança desde a Origem* (“Trust Since the Beginning”). The website shows locations, names, and dates on which the farms supplied JBS’ slaughterhouses with cattle. Using the georeferenced data provided by the company, our team was able to find the locations using GPS.

On its official website, JBS says that its meat is produced from animals treated with “respect and without suffering” and that it keeps them free from “pain, injuries, and diseases,” a description that could not be further from what was seen on the ranches. The company also states that its suppliers receive training in this area, but the farmers and workers that were heard by our team said that they never had any supervision from the company. “I’ve never seen any oversight. I have been here for 12 years and no one ever did that,” a worker from a cattle ranch in Mato Grosso do Sul told our reporters.

Besides JBS’ rules, the many recommendations from MAPA on animal welfare aren’t followed either. Since 2008, when the Permanent Executive Committee of Animal Welfare was established, MAPA published a series of manuals on how animals must be treated, which serve to guide producers, but they are not necessarily enforced.



See below the problems found by the reporters and the alternatives proposed by MAPA in each case:

Electroshocks and Beatings

Electroshocks are used to make the animals enter the trucks faster or remain standing up inside the trucks. To speed up the loading of the bulls, they are beaten.

Those punches agitate them to the point of trampling each other.

MAPA discourages the use of electric prods. According to its recommendations, the instrument must be “used only in emergencies, given the high risk of accidents caused by the animals’ reactions.”

The reporters witnessed animals being jabbed with electric prods in two trucks. One of them, from JBS, was taking the cattle to a slaughterhouse in the city of Barra do Garças in Mato Grosso. In another case, a supplier from a slaughterhouse in Goiânia was taking the cattle from one property to another, both with the same owner.

Branding and Immobilization

Immobilized in a violent way, calves are branded on the face with a hot iron on a rural farm in Mato Grosso. The procedure, which aims to identify the calves, is done without any care for the animals.

Violence Against the Calves

Before being branded on their faces, the calves suffer violently in the so-called “maternity”—the place where they hold the cows who have recently given birth away from the rest of the herd. The calves who were born on the day before the reporters’ visit were tied by the legs or neck and later dragged by horses.

Punches and Kicks

The reporters saw aggression toward calves and cows inside the chutes many times. On a feedlot in the city of Guarantã, São Paulo, and on a farm in Damolândia, Goiás, white flags were used to hit the animals.

The flags were supposed to indicate the direction for those animals to go in. According to MAPA’s recommendations, they should be used as “an extension of the arm, not as an instrument of aggression for beating or jabbing.”

Brazil doesn’t have a law regarding animal welfare on farms

The 1988 Constitution establishes that the government must prohibit “practices that submit animals to cruelty,” but there is no specific law about the welfare in the handling of animals in the country. (...)