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I have been asked by the Simple Heart Legal Team to review footage, inspection reports, and internal documents from Ridglan Farms in Dane County, Wisconsin and to evaluate animal welfare practices at the facility. Ridglan Farms is a large, commercial facility which breeds and sells thousands of beagles annually to research laboratories across the U.S. Ridglan also conducts its own research on the dogs on a contract basis.

I have been a licensed veterinarian in the state of California for more than 25 years. I graduated from the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine in 1998 after completing my undergraduate education at Stanford University. For the past 10 years I have been the chief veterinarian at an animal sanctuary where I have examined and cared for thousands of dogs, cats, goats, sheep, birds, and other animals. I have served as an expert veterinary witness in 9 criminal and civil cases, and have also testified in multiple legislative hearings regarding animal welfare issues.

Summary: Review of the data reveals a pattern of repeatedly recurring criminal animal welfare violations. Failure to provide adequate housing, exercise, and socialization has induced psychological torment in thousands of dogs. Puppies routinely become trapped in flooring, and older dogs incur injuries and foot infections due to the flooring. Painful surgical mutilations are routinely performed without anesthesia or sterile technique for procedures that do not benefit the dogs and induce chronic pain and psychological distress. Based upon willful failure to improve practices as demonstrated over a number of years, in my opinion Ridglan is unlikely to take corrective action of its own accord.

Dogs at Ridglan Farms are systematically housed in tiny enclosures, often alone, devoid of enrichment, causing dogs to display repetitive behaviors- spinning, pacing, and wall bouncing. This behavior indicates severe psychological torment and distress.

Widespread display of spinning, pacing, and wall bouncing behaviors observed at Ridglan indicate **high levels of psychological distress** in the animals.

Repetitive, stereotypic behaviors are widely understood by animal welfare experts to be a sign of inadequate housing and poor management. See [Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals eighth edition.](#), pg 63.

According to an inspection performed on 10/26/2016 by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture (ATCP)

“A number of adult dogs in the facility were displaying prominent stereotypical behaviors; such as: circling, pacing, and wall bouncing.”... “Efforts should be taken to address dog’s abnormal, stereotypical behaviors. Such behaviors are an indicator of the dog’s welfare.”

This same inspector recorded that adult dogs at the facility are housed in cages that are 2’ x 4’. They never leave their cage and, as noted by the state inspector, there are no outdoor exercise facilities.

Animal Activists on site in 2017 took extensive footage of dogs displaying these same repetitive behaviors.

On 2/27/2019 an AAALAC site inspector wrote:

“Numerous Animals were found single housed in enclosures that did not fulfill their daily exercise requirement.”

Failure to provide adequate space, exercise, and meet social needs at the Ridglan facility has led to the psychological torment of thousands of dogs over the years. Moreover, Ridglan has failed to improve their management practices despite repeated notification of the issues.

Dogs living in tiny cages are forced to step in their feces while puppies fall through large floor openings; dogs spend their lives on mesh floors and the uneven flooring causes painful foot injuries and infections.

Coated mesh flooring with openings for passage of feces has led to serious welfare issues at the facility for many years, including puppies’ legs and feet getting stuck and a high incidence of foot infections (interdigital pododermatitis). Despite claims by Ridglan to have rectified these issues, inspectors from different agencies noted serious violations in October of 2016 and again in December of 2023, as well as by animal activists in 2017 and an employee in 2021.

Flooring violations were flagged during an inspection performed on 10/26/2016 by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture (ATCP) and were noted again as recently as December 2023. The Animal Welfare Act States:

9 CFR, Chapter 1, Subchapter A (Animal Welfare Act) § 3.6 - Primary enclosures. Primary enclosures for dogs and cats must meet the following minimum requirements: General requirements. (2) Primary enclosures must be constructed and maintained so that they: (x) Have floors that are constructed in a manner that protects the dogs' and cats' feet and legs from injury, and that, if of mesh or slatted construction, do not allow the dogs' and cats' feet to pass through any openings in the floor;

According to the **ATCP inspector** on **10/26/16**:

Within several enclosures the feet and legs of puppies were found to be repeatedly passing through the floor openings (see pictures 3-4). In these instances the legs of puppies were observed to have passed completely below the mesh flooring up to the

puppy's chest. Puppies were observed to have noticeable difficulty standing or moving comfortably and naturally upon the floored surface due to the large size of the openings.

On **12/5/23** a **USDA inspector** noted:

Some of the weaned puppies and preweaning-aged puppies in eleven enclosures were observed to have feet or legs pass through the smooth-coated mesh floors when they walked.

Inadequate flooring for puppies is a serious animal welfare violation. When a puppy falls through holes in their enclosure, it inhibits their ability to move freely, express normal behaviors, and to reach food and water. Being forced to live on this type of flooring is a form of psychological and physical cruelty.

In addition, a Wisconsin ATCP inspector noted foot infections in some of the dogs in 2016, and all 3 dogs removed from the facility by animal activists in 2017 suffered from severe interdigital pododermatitis (foot infections) requiring veterinary care. By my own experience and consultations with veterinary specialists in the field of canine laboratory research, dogs living on mesh flooring repeatedly bump the area between toes on the uneven flooring, causing irritation and injury. In addition, fecal matter accumulates on the floor surface because the holes are not large enough for most feces to pass through. In a 2' x 4' cage it is impossible for a dog to avoid walking through feces and irritated/damaged skin exposed to feces frequently leads to infection. Interdigital dermatitis is highly irritating and even painful for dogs suffering from this infection.

Failure to rectify inadequate flooring at the Ridgland facility has resulted in unnecessary pain and suffering to thousands of dogs over the years. Ridgland has known about these problems for nearly a decade, yet has not taken effective action.

Inappropriate “surgical” mutilations are performed routinely at Ridgland without the use of anesthesia or sterile technique:

Examination of breeding documents at Ridgland reveals that hundreds of dogs bred there each year have a congenital eye condition known as prolapsed nictitating membrane or “cherry eye.” The term “cherry eye” was coined because of the mass of red, irritated membrane protruding from the eye. Not all cases of cherry eye require treatment, but in severe cases the protruding tissue will become dry and irritated without proper care.

My conversation with a former Ridgland employee revealed that as recently as 3 years ago the nictitating membrane (third eyelid) of dogs was routinely removed **without anesthesia or hemostasis (control of bleeding)** as a “treatment” for cherry eye.

Excision or removal of the prolapsed eye tissue is not an accepted technique for treating cherry eye within the veterinary profession. And of course failure to provide anesthesia or hemostasis for dogs undergoing surgery is never acceptable.

According to an [article](#) in the Clinician's Brief (a well respected veterinary publication), "Surgical removal of the third eyelid is strictly reserved for neoplasia of the nictitans and its gland or for traumatic injury severe enough to interfere with function of the nictitans and globe; *removal for "cherry eyes" or cosmetic reasons is inappropriate.*" (emphasis added)

Accepted technique for cherry eye surgery is complex and requires the skill of a veterinarian. According to a former employee at Ridgland, the procedure is done by staff (not a veterinarian) using a pair of scissors. Instead of blocking pain with anesthesia, the employee told me that dogs were held firmly in place to prevent them from squirming in response to the pain. The dogs would yelp during the procedure and since no attempt was made to clamp or ligate tissue, there was profuse hemorrhage. The employee told me that the dogs would be put aside and the blood would be hosed off later.

It should be noted that the eye is one of the most highly innervated, vascularized, and sensitive parts of a dog's body. Performing surgery on the eye without anesthesia causes severe pain and constitutes unnecessary cruelty. Failure to control bleeding could lead to life-threatening complications or death due to severe blood loss.

Current veterinary standards for cherry eye surgery require retention of the gland for tear production. Modern methods include surgical reattachment of the membrane beneath the eyelid to prevent protrusion. Without a nictitating membrane, most dogs will go on to suffer from a painful lifelong condition known as dry eye (keratoconjunctivitis sicca).

I would characterize the cherry eye "surgeries" performed at Ridgland as mutilations rather than surgeries. The procedures are highly painful in the absence of anesthesia and do not benefit the dogs, who later suffer chronic painful eye conditions as a result of having their third eyelids removed.

In addition, Ridgland routinely devocalizes dogs by cutting or removal of the laryngeal cartilage. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) strongly discourages devocalization surgery "because of the surgery's negative impacts on animal welfare."

The devocalization "surgeries" are presumably done at Ridgland for human convenience- to decrease noise level by muting barking sounds. (Note that devocalized dogs are usually still able to make barking sounds and footage from the facility reveals that the noise level is deafening). Rather than providing more space for the dogs and enrichment that would distract from barking, they are subjected to a painful, risky procedure that is not endorsed by the nation's leading veterinary association.

Failure to sterilize instruments used to devocalize the dogs, along with failure to wear surgical masks, sterile gloves, or otherwise practice sterile technique is another issue that has been flagged at Ridgland: An AAALAC site visit in 2013 noted Ridgland's failure to use sterile technique during devocalization surgeries, including failure to sterilize surgical instruments. Devocalization surgery poses risks of severe respiratory and other complications, and failure of sterile technique introduces a substantial risk of painful and life threatening infection.

Cherry eye removal and devocalization as commonly practiced at Ridglan Farms are mutilations leading to unnecessary pain, risk of complications, lifelong negative impact on welfare, and do not benefit the animals.

Conclusions: A persistent pattern of animal cruelty emerges from the data reviewed. More concerning is Ridglan's failure to rectify these matters despite awareness over a number of years. Due to poor management practices and improper housing, thousands of Ridglan dogs have been and continue to be subjected to psychological torment, painful infections, and surgical mutilations. The persistence of these problems over nearly a decade suggests that the facility has no intention of improving the situation, and that they will continue business as usual unless further action is taken.

I thank you for your attention. Please feel free to contact me with questions.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sherstin Rosenberg". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and contact information.

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