

“Incident in the Dairy Teaching Facility”

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You are a 4th year undergraduate pre-vet student working as an assistant manager at the campus dairy teaching facility. A sophomore pre-vet student, Jackie, who is working with you on your senior thesis project comes to you for advice. During one of Jackie’s practicum courses at the campus dairy, she witnessed another student in her class repeatedly and very forcefully kicking a cow in the body and then head. The cow, who was tethered, could neither defend herself nor get away, and prior to the incident was simply resting in its stall. Two other students and a dairy staff member were present but did not intervene. Jackie approached the other student about the incident, and notes that while she appeared to be embarrassed, and explained that she was just having a bad day and got impatient with the cow, she also didn’t seem to really get why Jackie would have any concerns, because, as she noted, “it’s just a cow.” Jackie is extremely concerned and disturbed by what she observed, especially because the student in question stands a good chance of getting into vet school, and she doesn’t believe someone capable of this behavior and attitude ought to be charged with the care of other people’s animals. She is also conflicted because no one else who saw the incident said anything, so now she wonders if she overreacted to what she saw even though she is clear that what she witnessed was unacceptable animal treatment. Jackie is considering reporting this student’s actions, but one, she isn’t sure to whom she should report it, and two, given that the staff member didn’t seem worried about it, she isn’t sure anyone will do anything other than identify her as a trouble maker, which could potentially impact her grade as the students are supposed to work as teammates. She also notes that she has heard the dairy manager make dismissive comments relative to undercover videos about farms that suggest he thinks that there aren’t real welfare problems occurring on farms, but rather that “liberals,” “ignorant people who don’t understand farming” and “animal activists” with a vegan agenda are creating problems for animal agriculture. Jackie also worries that if reporting the student might jeopardize her classmate’s chances of getting into vet school, but also it might look like she is trying to improve her own chance of acceptance by “eliminating the competition.” However, doing nothing doesn’t seem acceptable.

Questions about the case:

Q1: What would (or should) you advise Jackie to do? Provide a moral justification for your answer.

Q2: Regardless as to Jackie’s decision, do you have obligations to act given your role? If so, what should *you* do?

Information for Instructors Using “Incident in the Dairy Teaching Facility”

Ethical issues raised by this case include:

1. The reader is instructed to think that they are an assistant manager of the dairy teaching facility, so professional ethics may require (if only implicitly) that the reader ensure that the incident is reported.
2. The text of the case suggests that Jackie could have a conflict of interest, because if she informs on the student, her own chances of getting into vet school may be increased, but note that the reader is also instructed to think of her- or himself as being a 4th year pre-vet student. So in acting as professional ethics require she or he could simultaneously face a conflict of interest.

Teaching objectives for the case can include:

Acknowledging that with various roles come varying responsibilities. Sometimes these are explicitly stated in a published code of professional ethics, but other times there is no authoritative code to appeal to.

Supplementary resources:

Code of ethics of the American Veterinary Medical Association:

<https://www.avma.org/News/JAVMANews/Pages/150301f.aspx>

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association apparently doesn't yet have a national code of ethics (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3327587/>), just this oath:

<https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/about/veterinary-oath>.