Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I am Judy Simpson. Temple Grandin is many things to many people and she’s one of the more unique people you’ll ever meet. In 2010 Time Magazine named Grandin as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. For some Grandin is an innovator and forward thinker about the ethical handling and treatment of animals. For others she’s a role model for understanding and overcoming autism. Still others know her from the award winning movie that was made about her life. Grandin spoke at the 2012 Vermont Grazing and Livestock Conference in Fairlee. She took some time to sit down with Across the Fence's Keith Silva.

Keith.: Dr. Grandin thank you for joining us today. What should consumers know about meat processing as far as food safety and humane handling?

Dr. Grandin.: The common question I always get asked is: "Do the cattle know they're going to get slaughtered?" I had to answer that question when I first started my career. So I go out to the local big client and watch the cattle go up the shoot then I go to a farm and watch them go up the shoot they behave the same way in both places. If they knew they were going to get slaughtered they ought to be much more scared at the slaughterhouse. Cattle are afraid of a lot of little things we don't notice. A chain hanging down. It's too dark. There's a reflection on the floor, or a shiny piece of metal is moving. People are walking by, vehicles going by. If you get rid of those distractions than they walk right in.

Keith.: Meat processing isn't something people like to talk about. Should people know more about this industry or should they just worry about getting a steak?

Dr. Grandin.: About three years ago I put up on YouTube pictures of stunning cattle and pictures of stunning pigs. I thought it was time for people to actually see it. Many people in the industry were against that. Then you get teenage boys who write nasty things on the site and we have to boot them off but other people get in there and do some really good discussion. Michael Poland says slaughterhouses should have glass walls I think we should do that electronically. I’ve taken a lot of people from the general public through large slaughter plants and I always have them watch cattle get off the truck, watch the animals walk up the shoot. And they go: “Oh, they just walk right up
there calmly.” Now it's got to be well managed. It's got to be well managed or you can really have a mess.

Keith.: You work with commercial large scale industrial plants and slaughter facilities and things like that. In Vermont we are on a much smaller scale. What can we in Vermont from a small scale learn from the big guys?

Dr. Grandin.: The distractions that scare cattle are the same. You have to make sure you have non-slip floors. I've seen problems with the stun box floor being slippery in a small plant I've seen that in a big plant. They don't like to go into the dark. You can light up a shoot entrance with a light, put up a solid side so they don't see people walking by and when it comes to distractions it's the same both in big plants and little plants.

Keith.: You write in your book about autism in your biography that you think in pictures. I think I can understand that but how can people understand that for someone who has autism when you say you think in pictures.

Dr. Grandin.: Thinking in pictures is continuum everybody thinks some pictures a little bit but I tend to think in very specific pictures. If you say factory to me I see specific factories like a John Deere plant in Illinois, where most people see a generic thing like this with smokestacks on it. Also when I design equipment I can test run it in my mind. I didn't know that other people had difficulty doing that. I thought everybody could test run equipment in their mind. Thinking in pictures is more like how an animal thinks. An animal is a sensory based thinker it thinks in pictures thinks in sounds thinks in touch sensations. Think about all the information a dog gets off a local tree that's like going down to the coffee shop.

Keith.: Right so you think the same way you think in these pictures and whenever the metaphoric of tree is for you, you can see it in your mind and how it's going to work.

Dr. Grandin.: I see a dog and leaving his pee mail on a very specific tree right near my house.

Keith.: If a parent suspects their child may be autistic or on the autism spectrum, what's your advice to them?

Dr. Grandin.: If you have a two-year old child or three-year old child who's not talking who's not interacting with people, sits in the corner and is rocking or other repetitive behavior the worst thing you can do is do nothing. If you have problems getting services you have to get down and start working with that kid. Teaching how to take turns do games so then make a turn-taking game out of the penny he is twiddling around. Start teaching them some words you have to keep the brains connected to the world don't let them play video games all day and watch TV all day. You have to get them doing social interaction with people.

Keith.: Is misbehavior connected to autism at all?

Dr. Grandin.: All kids can misbehave whether there autistic or normal but in a real little kid normal kids will play with other kids autistic kids will be off by themselves. Play a lot, do turn taking games you have to teach these kids how to take turns.

Keith.: Is that a sharing thing to help them incorporate them into the play?
Dr. Grandin.: They have to learn that they can't always get their own way. A very good way to teach these children things like sharing and turn taking is a very simple board game.

Keith.: Last question what is it like to have your life made into a big Hollywood movie?

Dr. Grandin.: It was like going into a really strange time machine back to the sixties and seventies. They showed autism very accurately. The movie is being shown in a lot of schools to educate people about autism.

Keith.: What about for you specifically is it weird to see events in your life that time machine play out in front of you. Do you want to say it didn't happen that way or?

Dr. Grandin.: Well the main events and the main people like Anne and my science teacher those were all real, there were some events they had to compress and change but all the projects I built. Like the dip vat the magic gate you could open up in the car I actually built those things. They were done off of original drawings and original photos.

Keith.: Dr. Grandin thank you very much, and now back to the studio.

Judy.: OK thanks Keith well done and our thanks to Dr. Grandin for taking time to visit with us. Joining me now is Jenn Colby. Jenn is the organizer of the annual grazing and livestock conference in her role with UVM Extension and the University of Vermont Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Nice to have you back. Wow--that was exciting.

Jenn.: It was very exciting.

Judy.: What kind of response or feedback did you get from having Temple Grandin?

Jenn.: Nothing but overwhelmingly positive reactions. People were so enthralled by her. We were stunned because in the course of being in Vermont for less than 24 hours she impacted directly the lives of over 800 people. We ended up splitting up the program a little bit so we focused most of her day at the conference on farmer issues, humane handling issues, animal behavior and in the evening she did a special autism talk so there were 300 plus additional people who came just to hear her autism talk. I was absolutely speechless.

Judy.: She doesn't beat around the bush she tells it like it is.

Jenn.: She totally tells it like it is, yes. To the point where she actually stopped talking during one of her day talks and addressed someone in the audience because she thought that person might be napping. She wouldn't put up with that.

Judy.: She talks about animal behavior and how we should react to that. Or easier ways for us to understand what animals think and different species behave differently. Can you tell me a little bit about that and give me some examples of some of the behaviors and things to counteract.

Jenn.: Sure. There are a couple things to keep in mind. One is that animal species evolve differently throughout history. So some species such as for example sheep evolved as a prey species. They are
an herbivore—they eat grass, and they don't have a lot of or any natural defense abilities. They don't really kick, they don't bite, so they run. They have a heightened fear reaction. One of the things Dr. Grandin talked about and some of her books are the very basic behaviors that animals will manifest. Seeking behavior is a heightened sense of curiosity. You can see that in body language of an animal or the ears are up. Horses I know you have horses, so their ears are up, their eyes are bright their seeking they're looking they may be sniffing in a very gentle way vs. a fear behavior. In which case in the case of horses they may begin to sweat without a lot of exertion. There may be some tail-swishing, that sort of thing. In the case of sheep again or deer it's pretty typical to see some stamping and their body language will shift and you'll almost see them prepared to run because that's their natural reaction. Their fear reaction.

Judy.: It's funny I just saw a YouTube video of a bunny herding sheep. That's how that works.

Jenn.: Sheep can be really concerned about something that they haven't ever seen before so the natural reaction is going to be to run away. Our job as farmers and managers is to try to minimize the fear and maximize the seeking behavior that curiosity. I personally find that it a lot easier in my pigs then my sheep because pigs are omnivores they evolved completely differently. Have a heightened sense of curiosity all the time. Anyone who raises pig certainly knows. So pigs will often get into more trouble more easily because there looking for holes in the fence because they're curious animals and they read the world with their noses so they'll pick and poke.

Judy.: So while a sheep might see a fence as something to stay away from or be contained by a pig will see it as a challenge.

Jenn.: As a challenge exactly and goats will do a similar thing they have a high seeking behavior.

Judy.: Yes they do.

Jenn.: Goats have the ability to climb in some ways they are fairly acrobatic animals physically. This affects how you move them. The different ways that animals behave affects how you move them and affects how you may fence them or house them. I don't get concerned if my sheep do not have a lack of something to do as long as they have food they have water they feel protected and will generally stay where they're supposed to. Pigs get bored—I will often put something in their pen or give them tubs or various things that they can play around with. If they don't have those sorts of things they may decide to go on a walkabout down the road.

Judy.: And that's where the problems start.

Jenn.: And that's where the problem starts exactly.

Judy.: Can you tell whether an animal is in a good mood or bad mood and how do you react to that?

Jenn.: Part of it is reading their body language. We talk a lot about livestock but one of the wonderful things about Dr. Grandin’s book is that she talks about livestock but also companion animals, cats and dogs. It's funny because even if you don't have livestock many people who already have household pets get used to this. They know if their dogs whining if its head is down if its tail low if they make some sort of vocalizing then you know it's not happy maybe that's when the power goes out or lightning comes. Around our house it tends to be hunting season when the gun start going off and the dogs starts hiding under the bed that sort of thing. We see the same thing livestock
animals where their body language will shift. In some species that they will shift as if they need to move away as if they are really concerned. Ears flipping ears back is a very traditional sign in horses that they're not very happy so if we keep their ears up. Pigs vocalize a lot so if they are unhappy they will definitely be squealing loudly. Part of it is listening for their vocalization in reaction to something. If they are hit or hurt in some way they'll squeal very sharply or make a noise sharply and then it will stop. So just watching their bodies. It’s more obvious for many people than they may realize. They're not actively thinking about it and that's one of the things that Dr. Grandin teaches us--to pay attention to really what we already see.

Judy.: How can we adapt what's happening on the farm to go along with that and to work with that as opposed to have something that's counterproductive? Can you give me an example?

Jenn.: I can give you a shipping example to the processing facility because I'm a farmer as well. A few years ago I shipped my pigs to the processor and one of my goals is to get the pigs onto the truck without any squealing and to get them off the truck at the plant without any squealing. I felt very successful that year we had set up a good ramp system and encouraged the pigs to get onto the truck with food. They are highly motivated by food. They got onto the truck and when I got to the processing plant the young guy at the other end didn't really know. He liked pigs he clearly liked them but he didn't quite know how to work with them. He was trying to pull them or lead them and that's really difficult the way you need to move pigs is actually from behind moving them forward so they can have an open space in front and be curious of what's around the corner. So we changed up some systems so we have a board and began to push them off the truck. As soon as they have the open space and are being pushed from behind they step right off and go trotting around the corner it's a whole different experience. The difference between not working and working is a savings of 10 or 15 minutes of time plus stress the animal stress.

Judy.: Before we run out of time how can folks contact you or learn more about the programs?

Jenn.: Absolutely my e-mail address is jcolby@uvm.edu or my phone number is (802)-656-0858 we are happy to talk to people with all kinds of animal behavior and grazing issues.

Judy.: Great thanks a lot Jenn.

Jenn.: Thanks so much Judy.

Judy.: That's our program for today. I'm Judy Simpson and we will see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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