

Animal Activists Encroaching On Livestock Industry Practices

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Since animal rights activist groups in this country have emerged and expanded since the 1970s, animal owners and animal research scientists have experienced incidents of harassment, vandalism, public demonstrations, and efforts to limit their normal

and legal activities. The legislative efforts led by two of the largest groups, the Humane Society of the United States and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and supported by other activist groups has resulted in the Illinois legislature passing a law prohibiting the slaughter of horses and exporting the meat.

In Europe horse meat is sold and consumed as part of the human diet. In this country it is not sold for human consumption but some may be used for pet foods and zoo animals. Without any scientific basis, the animal activists used their philosophy that horses should be treated more like humans to get a law passed. So unwanted horses must now be shipped to Canada for slaughter.

Frank Bowman, representing the Illinois Horseman's Council fears that horses will be abandoned, and left to starve when feed prices are high. Local animal control and humane societies could lack the money to care for the abandoned animals.

Although horse slaughter and exporting horse meat is a small industry, Bowman has called on livestock groups to carry on educational efforts to prevent a federal law prohibiting horse slaughter. He believes that all livestock groups must unite to prevent further intrusion by animal rights groups into the normal and legal production of animals for food and pleasure purposes.

Bowman warns that these well funded groups are appealing to people removed by two or three generations from the farm and who feel that they are helping animals by contributing to the activist group efforts.

The horse slaughter ban is expected to have long term consequences for Illinois and other states. The problem of what to do with unwanted horses was not considered in the slaughter ban.

Bowman feels that the horse slaughter ban will lead to other restrictions that affect live-

stock operations. He cites prohibiting gestation crates for swine in Arizona and Florida as one animal rights group successful effort. Restricting use of riding trails in national forests and other public lands would restrict activities of horse owners. The recent Food and Drug Administration announcement that meat from clone animals is safe has opened the door for criticism and suspicion by individuals and groups who have no scientific basis for their actions. Other initiatives around the country are being promoted.

The Animal Agriculture Alliance located outside Washington, D. C. Is working to unite animal agricultural organizations and its members. Founded in 1987 the Alliance has established a network across the animal food chain and is addressing the issues faced by the livestock industry to counter the efforts by animal rights groups.

They are striving to educate the public to ensure their understanding of the industry's commitment to animal welfare and why it is important to support food production in the U. S. rather than becoming reliant on foreign countries for our food.

At the same time the Alliance is encouraging producers, processors, and other animal handlers to implement good animal husbandry practices developed by the national producer organizations.

The Alliance has brought a coalition of 11 animal and livestock groups together to address the National Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, a commission established by the Pew Charitable Trusts to investigate the impact of Confined Animal Feeding Operations on public health and rural communities. This group will be making policy recommendations. The Alliance may be successful in preventing some negative impacts of this commission's report.

The Alliance is also working with USDA in planning an international conference covering animal welfare issues.

The philosophy and fantasies of well intentioned but often misled animal rights activists will require constant oversight by all those involved in animal production, research, and marketing of animal products. Without education and understanding by concerned citizens, restrictions and regulation will result in unfavorable consequences and hinder progress for most phases of animal industry. Δ

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