

Can The U.S. Livestock Industry Survive?

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As we enter 2009, the U.S. livestock industry faces challenging issues that may determine its future profitability and survival. For several years farm leaders at the Illinois Farm Bureau annual meeting have discussed possible strategies to keep the Illinois livestock industry viable. The number of farms producing beef, pork, and poultry products has declined. Yet the market for a significant part of Illinois corn and soybeans depend on the use of these crops by Illinois livestock and poultry.

Farm leaders in Indiana have recently shown increased concerns about the future of their livestock industry. Kay Johnson, executive secretary of the Animal Agriculture Alliance recently met with Indiana producers to assess the current climate for the U. S. livestock industry.

However, these concerns for the livestock industry are nationwide. Animal producers and those whose employment depend on consumer demand and acceptance are justified in facing up to the obstacles they face. The Animal Agriculture Alliance works to counter some of the efforts by the animal rights movement and the \$300 million spent each year to target modern animal agriculture. These groups are using many tactics including the internet, scare tactics, lawsuits, undercover employment, and videos.

Recently, some groups have used ballot initiatives to limit livestock production practices such as use of gestation stalls and laying cages. When these groups get enough signatures for a statewide ballot initiative, it is almost impossible for these not to get passed. Johnson pointed out.

The ultimate goals of these groups is to get federal legislation that would cover all states. So animal agriculture leaders will watch closely any efforts to influence a new administration in Washington. Some activist groups have tried to influence restaurants and retail food stores about the production methods used for the products they sell.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Humane Society of the United States have bought shares of stock in publicly traded animal agriculture companies so they can introduce shareholder restrictions as a way to implement their desires. Violence and terrorists activities against production and research facilities continue to take place. Some efforts have been made to influence religious leaders to spread the word that animal agriculture is going against the moral obligation to take care of one's food.

As part of rural development and rural zoning, some states have laws to regulate the siting of large scale animal facilities. Because of the high costs of land and feed production for livestock, some major dairy producers in California have moved to other states. The process of getting location permits has not been easy. Some producers have succeeded.

But a major dairy operation in Illinois has been delayed because local residents including farmers have objected to this large scale operation. They fear the effects on rural roads, of increased traffic, of possible odors, and workers different from the current residents.

State departments of agriculture usually support new and modern confinement operations because they offer new markets for local feed and forage production, new jobs for the community, and a growing rural area. County boards, influenced by local nonfarm residents may provide the strongest obstacles to an expanding livestock industry.

Our state universities have conducted research to show that confinement livestock and poultry operations, following proven scientific practices can be beneficial to a community and provide healthy, wholesome food products for a growing population. The efforts to implement country of origin labeling should also help promote consumption of food products from domestic sources including those originating close to home.

To be successful, livestock industry leaders in each state will need to launch public relations programs to show that expanding livestock production can be an asset for employment, increasing the local tax base, and support for local schools and churches. Δ

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