

Livestock Care Campaigns Threaten Modern Production Systems

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Animal rights and animal welfare organizations and their activities are not new. During the 1980s and 1990s, animal rights activists conducted destructive acts of vandalism, theft, illegal trespassing, and threats to scientists conducting animal related research.

In recent years, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has taken a more legal strategy – legislative initiatives and ballot propositions – to further their goal to control and to force food animal producers to change their production practices that have proven scientifically profitable and efficient.

In 2006, Arizona voters passed a historic initiative – the Humane Treatment of Farm Animals Act, promoted by HSUS. Arizona became the first state to prohibit the confinement of calves in veal crates and confinement of pregnant sows in gestation crates. HSUS sees these practices as “inherent cruelty” while scientific evidence shows that these practices are lower cost, labor saving and a more efficient way to produce veal and pork.

In California in 2008, an anti-cruelty measure passed that will phase out use of cages for producing eggs, resulting in reduced production of eggs in California and higher costs for consumers.

In Oregon, the state legislature has banned the use of gestation crates. The Maine legislature banned veal crates and gestation crates in 2009.

In Washington DC, HSUS supports the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act. The goal is to phase out the routine non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in farm animals, a common practice to promote growth and maintain the effectiveness of antibiotics for treating sick people and animals.

Along with the goal to ban cage layers, HSUS reports many efforts to promote consumption of cage free eggs. These include actions by city councils, university food services, hotel chains, food manufacturers, and restaurants.

HSUS views their “Factory Farming Campaign

as a way to ease the suffering of the billions of farm animals raised and killed each year in the United States”. They proudly report that their strategies include “corporate outreach, grassroots advocacy and legal and legislative challenges.”

The organization is now working in New York to pass a bill similar to one passed California. They have approached farm groups in Ohio and Michigan to support legislation that would further their animal protection goals without a costly state wide referendum. Livestock leaders in Missouri and Georgia wonder if they may be targeted next.

The eventual goal of this state by state strategy seems to be a federal law that would cover all states and achieve some of the same restrictions passed in states that had few swine or poultry interests to oppose the state wide initiatives.

Behind the “successful” efforts by HSUS lies the lack of knowledge by city dwellers about how livestock and poultry are produced to provide wholesome food products that they find in the supermarkets and their favorite restaurants. Recently Fox News Bill O'Reilly blasted a HSUS staff members for their exploitation of children with their “unhappy meals” campaign against McDonalds. He pointed out that not all parts of livestock and poultry production, slaughter and processing are pleasing to observe, but that these steps are, and always have been, necessary to carry out the production and processing steps.

Livestock producer, processor and marketing leaders are aware of HSUS strategies and tactics. For example, The Center for Consumer Freedom, Center for Food Integrity, and Farmers Feed Us are taking steps to educate consumers about the economics and safety of their food and counter HSUS tactics. The American Farm Bureau through state and county groups promote Farm in the Classroom efforts to educate students about farmers and where their food comes from. These leaders also recognize the need to educate people about what HSUS is doing, their one sided philosophy and how their policies may affect the costs and availability of their food. Δ

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