

# ***Animal Rights: Addressing the Concerns***

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## **Introduction**

In the US today, less than 2% of the population is actively engaged in agriculture. As a result, the American public may have lost its basic understanding of how food is produced, transported, manufactured, and delivered to their grocery stores. In my college classes, non-agricultural students have expressed shock when they learned that “dairy bulls do not produce milk” and have asked me “why do you use sale barns” and “do you put in bleach to make cow’s milk white?” I teach agricultural courses at Missouri State University, in Springfield, MO, located in an area that is 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in cow/calf production. If college age students in Springfield are this naive as to agricultural production, then one has to wonder how out of touch the rest of society is.

As technology improves and land prices increase, we will have to produce more food on fewer acres of land. While this can be celebrated as an achievement in technology and has provided food at a cost of less than 10% of our disposable income on food, it has caused declines in the overall quality of life of some farmers and some of the food producing animals. Livestock, such as poultry and swine have been the most concentrated, with dairy cattle and feedlot steers and heifers condensed in small lots to increase production and decrease costs. This new environment is one that is not natural to their “*telos*”. The *telos* of an animal is simply that which comes natural to each animal. Fish swim, birds peck, pigs root, cows eat grass.

Just as technology and agricultural production methods have changed, so have the ethics within our society. Ethics have changed before in the US, as shown during the women’s and civil rights movements. At one time, it was considered ethical to trade people as slaves but as societies change, ethics change and what society deems as ethical regarding modern agriculture has changed. Agriculture must also change, in this case, perhaps not to become more efficient, but to become less efficient while perhaps more humane in dealing with livestock housing and harvesting methods. As agriculture works towards more humane conditions, it must also strive to educate the consumer as to the rationale behind the production methods employed. One does not win ball games by only having a strong defense but by having both a strong defense and a strong offense. **In today’s world, as compared to the animal rights movement, agriculture has neither.** As summarized from Dr. B.E. Rollin from Colorado State University, “either we change, or society will change us without having an understanding of what it is they are changing and the impacts change will cause”. If agriculture can put forth a strong offense and defense, animal rights groups will lose their unyielding grasp on shaping consumers’ minds.

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## The Animal Rights Movement

What is an animal's right? One has probably asked themselves this question...though perhaps not being conscious of it. We are farmers in this room today. We have tended to the needs of our livestock. What rights do those animals have? What did you do for your animals before you left the comfort of your home to come to this symposium? You probably made sure they had food, water, shelter and perhaps companionship. You have provided for them a safe place to dwell, a place where they thrive and do well. You have the basic understanding that if you take care of the animal; the animal takes care of you. This is what is known as animal husbandry and within it is an understanding that your animals have rights, rights that you would defend. If the proverbial fox were to invade your henhouse, what would you do? If the politician tries to invade your henhouse, what do you do, or at least what would you like to do? Animals have rights, at least yours do, and since yours do, you respect your neighbors animals as having rights similar to the ones yours have.

The ancient understanding of animal husbandry was simply the commonsense knowledge that your animals have rights and those rights are afforded to them by you. However, the radical animal rights groups have taken rights to a new level. To them, "animal rights" is the belief that animals and humans have the **same** rights. In their definition, animal rights is the belief that animals should not be used for food, clothing, companionship, hunting, sports, or any other use and that animals and humans are equal. As taken from the HSUS website "there is no rational basis for maintaining a moral distinction between the treatment of humans and other animals". (The Humane Society of the United States, 1980.) The phrase "**animal rights**" is the same; it is the definition of the phrase that differs.

The radical definition of animal rights has evolved over the centuries. As societies become more and more affluent, and inhabitants have the luxury of time, they spend more time dwelling and contemplating life. As they do this, they tend to think more about the treatment of others, including animals. When food is plentiful, we have more time to contemplate therefore; the radical definition of animal rights seems to go along with affluence. Who worries more about animal rights, a mother in Iowa in current times, or a mother surviving the drought and depression during the dirty 30's?

The animal rights movement has been forged along the same lines as the proliferation of ethical issues including feminism, racism, and *speciesism*. One would not like being referred to as a racist, so it seems that these same people would rather not be called a *speciest*, which is a person who puts their own species above another. This is much like the word *vivisectionist*, a word that perhaps sounds morally questionable and is. The debate over vivisection – meaning to cut into a living organism – has been debated in scientific circles for centuries despite the

benefit of vivisection to the development of medical treatments and cures for countless diseases and ailments in both humans and animals.

### **Who are the activists?**

The public is being inundated with propaganda regarding the inhumane treatment of modern livestock operations flowing from animal rights groups such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) who are two of the most influential animal rights groups in the world. As we will see, one is successful because they are extreme; one is successful because they are cunning.

Who are the people involved in the animal rights movement? They tend to be white, middleclass females who are highly educated and are probably removed from the farm. I have often wondered if they like animals more than people. Modern animal rights activists claim to want to defend those who cannot defend themselves, yet they tend to be pro-abortion. Those who are active in the animal rights groups have an advantage over many of the farmers in the US – they understand technology and have millions of dollars at their disposal. Using digital pictures, websites, video (U-tube), and the media come seemingly natural to them and they use them in their arsenal against you and me. Many of the players in the animal rights movement get caught up in emotion and fail to see the facts and unfortunately base decisions on irrational emotions while rarely taking the time to understand the issue of concern. Like many in society, they lack a strong understanding of agricultural or scientific knowledge.

A good thing about the animal rights group is that they are good at what they do. They are “media sluts” as Igrid Newkirk once said and can organize protests and easily manipulate the media. They grab attention through emotion or public nudity or other “shock and awe” acts rather than boring the public with facts. Publicity also works against them as many are seen as “nuts” and “pro-violence” as it seems that their more outrageous actions get most of the attention. In truth, most of those who believe in the radical definition of animal rights are peaceful, affectionate, educated people who only wish to “save” the animals.

### **PETA.**

PETA is the most successful extreme animal rights group in operation today. They have purchased stock in places that sell/serve meat so they can dictate operations and policy that are in direction relation to animals purchased for the company. In 2002, PETA’s income was **\$24,082,725.00** but by 2004, their income had increased to **\$28,926,924.00**. This is not an animal welfare group as they spend less than 1% of their millions helping animals in shelters, those hit by natural disasters, etc. For example, in 2007, the Colorado Cattleman’s Association made a plea to PETA asking them to provide funds to help with the huge feeding/rescue effort

of the millions of cattle affected by the West/Midwest Ice Storm. PETA refused saying the animals are just going to slaughter anyways which shows the true side of PETA and lack of knowledge about agriculture. PETA's lack of agricultural understanding has stifled their knowledge of a quick death versus freezing or starving to death and their lack of knowledge fails them in understanding that momma cows, living their life out on the open ranges, doing what cows do and living where the "deer and antelope roam", were the ones that would have been helped by their donation.

### **Attention grabbers**

PETA tends to obtain media attention by making bold and outrageous comments. As posted on their websites, *"Pig-man died for our sins of nourishment"*. Another statement, *"Until your daddy learns that it's not 'fun' to kill, keep your doggies and kitties away from him. He's so hooked on killing defenseless animals that they could be next!"*, was found on a **PETA** booklet called "Your Daddy Kills Animals," which was designed to be handed out to children. *"Decades from now, what will you tell your grandchildren when they ask whose side you were on during the 'animals' holocaust'? Will you be able to say that you stood up against oppression?"* Clearly not the statements of regular, ordinary citizens, still, even with this lunacy; they are one of the most powerful animal rights groups in the world.

With PETA comes a variety of celebrities. For example, after Cameron Diaz was told that pigs have the mental capacity of a 3-year-old child, she proclaimed "Eating bacon is like eating my niece!" Others like the voluptuous Pamela Anderson are also outspoken personalities toting the virtues of PETA. If as quoted by PETA, "70% of hogs have pneumonia by the time they're sent to the slaughterhouse," I would probably go vegetarian too. If it was true that "chickens are fed massive amounts of drugs, hormones, and pesticides," I might refrain from consuming store bought chicken and only consume chickens from my own farm. Of course, modern agriculture has afforded us the luxury of not being forced to kill our own food; so many Americans would probably give up meat or decrease their intake if they had to kill and process their own meat, which of course is what members of the animal rights groups want.

According to Toni Vernelli – a past coordinator of PETA's European operations claims that **"Serving a burger to your family today, knowing what we know, constitutes child abuse. You might as well give them weed killer."** I am guilty as charged. As time goes on, this group will become more and more aggressive and violent. "We ask nicely for years and get nothing. Someone makes a threat, and it works" - Ingrid Newkirk. This group will more than likely get more and more radical and probably become more and more wealthy.

What is the main agenda of this group? **"Total animal liberation"**.

**PETA: Top 10 Reasons Not to Eat Cows**

- 1 - Help your health by leaving cows alone
- 2 - Cows are too nice to eat
- 3 - Even cowboys don't eat meat anymore
- 4 - Hormones – It's what's for dinner
- 5 - Torture 101
- 6 - Stealing from the poor
- 7 – Amazing escapes
- 8 – Filthy air; toxic water
- 9 – It's mad to eat meat
- 10 – It's easy to be kind

### **The Humane Society of the United States.**

While PETA becomes more and more radical and extreme, the most successful animal rights group in the United States is the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). In my mind, this is also the one to be most cautious of. HSUS is headed by Wayne Pacelle and has become more and more sophisticated through his tutelage. Mr. Pacelle is a well dressed, well spoken, handsome man who is far from the image of the radical animal rights activist that PETA portrays. Though their name implies that they work towards the *humane* treatment of animals, this group has given comparatively little to local humane societies and is **not** associated with the local humane society chapters. In 2002, HSUS gave less than \$150,000 to local humane societies and shelters.

Mr Pacelle is a true follower of the animal rights movement and according to Mr. Pacelle, *“there is no rational basis for maintaining a moral distinction between the treatment of humans and other animals”* and *“The life of an ant and the life of my child should be accorded equal respect.”* (Associated Press, January 15, 1989). HSUS was started to end all animal agriculture as quoted by John Goodwin, a grassroots coordinator of HSUS *“My goal is the abolition of all animal agriculture.”* This is not just ending the CAFO's, this is about ending all animal agriculture. In a perfect world, members in this group would like to force society to go to a vegetarian-type lifestyle. However, the group itself is intelligent enough to know that this goal is unlikely, still if they can decrease meat and milk consumption and decrease the use of animals used in animal experimentation, therefore seemingly to decrease animal suffering, if they take a more moderate approach. It is a noble cause in some ways, as who likes the idea of animal suffering? We wouldn't allow our livestock to succumb to unnecessary suffering, so why would we allow others? Perhaps the difference isn't in the cause; it is in the **definition** of **“suffering”**.

In the 1970's, HSUS was a small organization with **\$500,000** in the bank. By 1994 they had a budget of **\$22,000,000**. In 2003 wise financial decisions and strong donations helped give HSUS **\$113,000,000** which included **\$16 million** in cash and **\$80 million** invested in securities. The devastation of Katrina proved good for HSUS, who landed **\$32,000,000** in donations helping them accumulate **\$150,000,000**, with **\$200 million** in the bank. Needless to say, this is the wealthiest animal rights group in the world. Who gives them money? Well, apparently we do. In 2005, the US Agency for International Development gave HSUS **\$500,000**. Others are large private endowments, businesses, and individuals who think they are really helping animals.

Of late, HSUS has been successful in changing production practices in American agriculture. The most notorious success came in 2003 when sow farrowing crates were outlawed in Florida. Florida now has given sows constitutional rights. (Does a sow know what a constitution is?) The result, the two largest hog producers sold their hogs, most likely going to slaughter. I believe American farmers should have realized that gestation crates and leaving animals in them year-round is hard to explain to consumers. However, they were not alone in their thinking as many in agriculture fail to understand why they have to explain what they do to the American public. I will say that I think that hogs deserve more rights than to stand in gestation crates for a majority of their lives. At the same time, I think farrowing crates have a proper place and time.

HSUS has taken the success of 2003 and continued with their work with the most recent success being the passage of Proposition 2 in California. This bill was passed overwhelmingly, 63 to 33% when California consumers decided to provide rights to chickens and allow them to have more room. Proposition 2 also banned sow gestation crates. I taught a class on the animal rights movement this past fall which was made up of a majority of agriculture students, and most of these students had true agriculture backgrounds and lived on farms. I had them research this bill and decide in class whether they would have supported its passage. The majority in my class agreed with Proposition 2 and would have voted for it. I respectfully disagreed with my class, not because I am opposed to the proposition itself, but because I am an admitted capitalist and believe in small government. I would hope that the consumer preference for meat, milk, eggs, etc, produced from humanely treated animals, would shape the humane treatment of those animals, however, I am probably living in "lala land" and government might have to step in to ensure animals are being treated as society deems necessary.

The Humane Society of the United States also trying to end the "inappropriate" use of antibiotics in livestock. Without antibiotics, raising livestock will become harder and more expensive, and this expense will be passed onto the consumer which leads into an economic

reason to go vegetarian. HSUS is working with *Keep Antibiotic Working Coalition*, a group engaged in taking away the ability of livestock producers to properly treat their livestock. I am not saying that all antibiotics given to animals are needed. Just because a cow is limping, doesn't mean she needs a big shot of LA 200. If animals need a constant supply of antibiotics to stay productive, then perhaps management of them should be considered and changed. I have also stood in line at a pharmacy and heard a guy bragging because he was getting antibiotics for his cold – which is caused by a virus and is not susceptible to antibiotics. Those who can write the prescription for the use of antibiotics should take a more responsible route when they administer them and those taking or using antibiotics in their daily lives should also bear some responsibility in their actions as well. **As agricultural producers, we must regulate ourselves and become better stewards of our livestock.**

### **Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement**

Think because you live in Iowa you are immune? There is a small time animal rights group located at 2001 Forest Avenue, Des Moines, IA calling itself *Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement*. As a large hog state, Iowa will become the focus of debate in the years to come. You have already had billboards touting the inhumaneness of intensive animal agriculture, be ready for more.

### **What should be realized?**

If we consider the efforts of the animal rights groups and the success they have had in Florida, California, and other states, we need to realize that society is changing and agriculture needs to change as well. Leaders in agriculture need to come forward with positive messages about animal agriculture and back those messages with the changes needed within our industry to ensure the welfare of our livestock. Change needs to take place within agriculture as change has occurred within society. This change must not just sit on the shoulders of large agribusiness, but on the smaller farmer as well.

### **ConsumerFreedom.com**

The animal rights groups do have one well organized and well funded group keeping tabs on the animal rights movement. Consumer Freedom is an organization that touts that it is trying to protect the consumer. I suspect it is most likely funded by big business; I therefore take what they claim with a grain of salt. On this website, there are links to other websites which keep track of the financial doings of animal rights and anti-consumer groups. This group, like the animal rights groups we have already discussed has an agenda and is not completely innocent *nor* is it completely guilty of presenting half-truths and trying to obtain publicity for itself. David Martosko, head honcho of Consumer Freedom, has come out strongly against

HSUS, "This group is more about high dollar professionals making money than helping animals." There is probably some truth to this statement and those who earn a living working for HSUS are professionals like lawyers, accountants, etc. Mr. Martosko has also stated, "Animal rights activism is more about protest, pressure and raising hell than actual animal care". Again, I feel that there are members of the animal rights groups who would certainly fit into this description (like anyone wearing a lettuce bikini on a cold day or those who bomb research labs and car lots) yet others do genuinely care about the daily life of animals.

### **Where were they when they were needed?**

In the past few years, the American coast has been hit with strong hurricanes and other natural disasters. As of recent, East Texas was hit hard by the hurricane Ike. In all there were over 4,000 dead cows in portions of two Southeast Texas counties with 30,000+horses/cows roaming free in and amongst the gators and debris. The Texas Cattlemen's Association was doing what it could to take food and water to these animals and was helping ranchers locate their lost livestock. Where was PETA? Where was HSUS? Katrina? The Midwest Ice Storms? How about helping our local shelters that due to the worsening economy have seen more animals, and fewer resources? Some in California have even protested animal shelters because they put unwanted animals down, yet PETA kills one-third of the dogs and cats taken to their organization. We can no longer kill horses for meat in the United States. These unwanted animals are now going to Mexico and Canada for slaughter.

In the United States, we regulate how animals are killed. Does Mexico? So, who cares about livestock - agriculture or the animal rights groups? Both? Neither? Sometimes I truly wonder. "I think if anyone went into ... one of these battery cage houses—[and] they saw, they smelled, they felt—they would never eat another egg from one of those houses again," says Nigel Walker of Eatwell Farm in Dixon, California (no relation). I have to say, I have never been to a large poultry organization like what Mr. Walker is describing, and if I did, I wonder what effect it would have on me. I also know that I started off with 20 chicks and am down to 6 on my farm. My cat, dogs, a chicken hawk, and the disk mower all had a bite out of my chicken adventure. Perhaps I am simply not a good chicken producer?

We must take an active role in modernizing modern agriculture. Colorado Governor Bill Ritter signed legislation prohibiting confinement methods - gestation crates and veal crates. As stated by Dr. B.E. Rolling who was instrumental in joining the efforts of animal rights groups and farmers states that "This legislation is proof that humane groups and agriculture interests can work together to find common ground and move toward better treatment of farm animals. The movement toward ending abuses such as gestation crates and veal crates is unmistakable, and states elsewhere should follow this example". The veal crate provision was a preemptive



measure and Colorado the first state to ban the use of gestation crates and veal crates by action of a state legislature not mandated by a citizen vote. As is evidenced by other state votes, such as Florida, Arizona and California as well as Oregon, what the voter could have passed may have been much stronger than what the Governor signed. As far as I know, farrowing crates are still allowed, but forcing a sow to spend her life in a pen too small to turn around seems a bit much for me. Agribusiness is changing as evidenced by Smithfield Foods who is phasing out gestation crates and American Veal Association voted to urge the veal industry to phase out veal crates. Colorado-based chain Chipotle refuses to buy pork from producers using gestation crates and chains such as Safeway, Burger King, Carl's Jr. and Hardees have implemented policies to reduce their reliance on gestation crate pork. I am glad that agriculture and the animal rights groups came together and dictated their own fate, I am however leery of working to close with an animal rights group such as HSUS. As the saying goes, "keep your friends close, and your enemies closer".

### **When do we wake-up?**

When do we tell the agribusinesses enough is enough, quit bringing all of agriculture down with you when one of your employees decides to beat a hog or use a forklift to take a downed cow to slaughter. When do we tell our neighbors...enough is enough? I was once at a goat judging clinic when I overheard a veterinarian bragging that "dairy cows were milked till their wheels came off". I cringed. Not because I am afraid of the truth, but because how can I explain a statement like that to the general public. Nobody is perfect and I have done things I regret and hope I am not a hypocrite reminding you about animal welfare. I hope that as we all grow and are reminded of our ethics and the importance of what we do, we can see the mistakes of our past and challenge ourselves to do better.

I also wonder when is a person considered more important than a chicken? When will the value of human life be more important than that of animals? In Spain, it is now illegal to keep your pet monkey in a cage and, the law refers to monkeys and apes as our *non-human brothers*. In Switzerland, it is now illegal to throw unwanted live goldfish down the toilet, or keep pet parrots, hamsters and such in a cage by themselves. In Switzerland, it is against the law to use live bait when fishing and catch-and-release fishing has been outlawed. Where are the newspaper articles describing how we should treat other humans? The world is changing.

### **So what do we do?**

What can we do? We must get educated about agriculture, modern practices, and what society wants, after all, society is our customer, and the customer is always right, right? Well, maybe,

but only when the customer is educated by both sides of the animal rights/animal welfare argument. In order to educate them, we must speak out and visit with our urban neighbors. There is absolutely no reason why a senior in college doesn't know that dairy bulls do not produce milk or that we do not put bleach in milk. Why is it that physical education and introduction to college life are required courses in some Universities but agriculture is not? The students must learn geography and art and science, all worthy components of an education, but not where their food comes from nor how it is produced? How can society sustain itself if it cannot produce its own food because society has passed laws and regulations running agriculture out of its country? If we don't fill society's needs and do not educate society as to our needs, we are in a losing situation. What can you do? Do you know how to contact your elected officials? If you do not – find out and contact them. Contact your local school boards and colleges and ask them why a class on agriculture is not mandatory. We must also clean up our mistakes and work towards the ethical treatment of animals. We must decide what acceptable behavior is in our industry and what is not, and govern ourselves. In addition, we must also come together and become unified in production agriculture. As of 2008, Iowa lost 200 farmers with my own state of Missouri lost 500 farmers. In the US, we lost a total of 13,280 farms (USDA Statistics Service Report, 2008). I am saying **farmers**; I am not saying hog farmers, cattle farmers or chicken farmers. **Farmers!** "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (God). "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Abraham Lincoln (1858)

### **Deep thoughts...**

Can animal agriculture stay viable? Yes – but maybe not in this country. Can the public understand why we do what we do in our industry? I don't think so....unless we unite within our agricultural family and work together. This does not mean we all come together and sing "Cum-by-ya", this simply means that the various components of agriculture realize we all have the same end goal – produce safe food that we are proud of. We must look at our consumer and realize that our consumer's wants and needs have changed and we must change to stay viable. We cannot, as what has been done in the past, turn a blind eye to our consumers wants. We must change or be changed. Perception is reality and the reality is that our customer's ethics have changed.