

# A Break For Farm Animals

by Ramona Huff

The election made history in more than one way-- Proposition 2 in California passed by a wide margin. Now the lives of almost 20 million farm animals have been made a little better. This ballot initiative was cosponsored by Farm Sanctuary and the Humane Society. Remember the Humane Society that blew the whistle on the Westland/Hallmark Meat Company in California for their blatant animal cruelty in their processing facility. What this means is that by 2015 some farm animals will be able to stand up, lie down, turn around and fully extend their limbs. This will ban two-foot-wide crates that confine pregnant pigs and calves raised for veal. It will eliminate battery cages where four or more hens live in a space about as big as a file drawer. The ballot's wording says chickens must be able to spread their wings without touching the sides of their cage.

Florida and Arizona have already passed similar bills and last spring with the threat of a ballot initiative in Colorado, livestock leaders sat at the negotiating table with the Humane Society to draw up new legislation. Bringing agriculture producers in Colorado to the negotiating table was a really big deal. These producers could have easily raised funds to fight the Humane Society's efforts, however surveys revealed that they might be unsuccessful by countering this very emotional campaign. This indicates that consumers are getting smarter; they care about animal welfare and they will not tolerate animal abuses any longer.

Wayne Pacelle, Humane Society's C.E.O. is responsible for taking

this group from protecting the welfare of cats and dogs to now include, pigs, cattle and chickens. Many applaud their political prowess; they have taken their message to the mainstream by referring to their work as "animal protection" as opposed to "animal rights." They have softened the rhetoric and shifted the responsibility. Instead of intrinsic rights of animals, the responsibility has shifted in the direction of human behavior and the responsibility we have toward animals. Their campaign has been very strategic. By releasing commercials that depict farm animals in deplorable conditions such as calves pulling against their tethers in the crates and pigs biting on metal bars, they have intentionally sent a very powerful and emotional message that "cruelty is cruelty" and that animals do not do that to themselves—it is people who are responsible for protecting the animals.

National exposure has helped Pacelle promote humane treatment of animals. He appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show, among others, discussing Proposition 2 with the opposition. Ellen DeGeneres was involved in a fund raising campaign for the proposition. Similar promotion opportunities are expected to continue for aid in other states.

I, for one, applaud these efforts. There are very few federal laws that apply to farm animals. There



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are federal laws that apply to slaughtering and transportation of farm animals but none regarding the treatment while they live on the farm (or CAFO). Up until now, many state legislatures were unwilling or unable to pass laws on farm-animal welfare. It will be interesting to see if other states begin passing similar bills.

Nine billion animals are killed for food every year, most of them raised in CAFO's (concentrated animal feed operations—better

known as "feed lots"). Twenty million animals in California may seem diminutive but we can do our part here in Virginia by asking if our holiday fare this year could walk around and stretch its wings and if it had access to fresh air and pasture. 🐔

Happy Holidays.

*Ramona Huff is a local farmer and food enthusiast, along with her husband, Collins and their two children, CR and Catherine they raise their heritage livestock and artisan meats.*

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