

General Sessions

Animal Welfare

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What Are Animal Welfare People Telling Us?

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In brief, the animal welfarists are telling us that the most popular systems for producing meat, milk and eggs in the U.S. constitute abuse and deprivation of the animals involved. They aren't complaining about the managers, some of whom admittedly are cruel and abusive on occasion; no one condones that. Rather, they are objecting to the systems themselves—battery cages for laying hens, stalls for veal calves, confinement hog production systems and certain cattle management practices.

What livestock agriculture is telling them, in response, is equally important and I'll attempt to touch on that aspect of the issue as well.

First, let the animal welfarist define the issue in their own words:

The Humane Society of the United States, in a pamphlet on "Animal Rights . . . and Human Obligations" notes that philosophers identify at least three categories of rights: legal rights, natural rights and moral rights. HSUS says that it's the category of moral rights that is the "basis for our assertion of animal rights."

The pamphlet points out that HSUS has formally recognized that "...there is ample evidence and support for the position that (animal) rights naturally evolve from long-accepted doctrines of justice or fairness..." and "...there is no rational basis for maintaining a moral distinction between the treatment of humans and other animals."

HSUS says further: "When we say that animals have rights, we mean that animals should be included within the same system of moral protections that govern our behavior toward each other."

In a pamphlet urging support for a bill in Congress that would regulate care of animals used in research, HSUS called on members to remind their congressmen "that your tax money help support a miserable existence for millions of lab animals used in many federally funded facilities."

In a pamphlet on Factory Farming, HSUS says "Behind

these packages of clean and wholesome-looking food is the agribusiness reality of mass production of meat, eggs and milk from farm animals who often lead miserable lives." They like that term miserable to describe the conditions of our livestock.

What do they suggest in that pamphlet for people who object to these "miserable conditions. "Some react," they say, "by becoming vegetarians." They suggest that those who continue to eat animal products "be aware of which animals suffer the most and avoid buying those products." Veal is suggested as the first such target and it's veal that HSUS has conducted an advertising campaign against, urging a consumer boycott. "In general," HSUS says, "consumers ought to endeavor to eat less products of animal origin."

So that's what the Humane Society of the United States is telling us: The conditions under which we keep livestock make them miserable and consumers should restrict, or eliminate entirely, the consumption of meat, milk and eggs.

What about some of the other groups, and there are many involved in this issue, ranging from radical vegetarian groups to moderate animal protection groups. Then there is Livestock Conservation Institute, whose members have been doing more than just criticizing treatment of livestock—they've been working to improve animal care for decades.

The program for a meeting of radical elements involved in the issue in October of this year gives an idea of the breadth of their involvement. That meeting, called Mobilization for Action, "A gathering to plan, initiate and continue direct action to end animal suffering," noted that the goal is to "create a world in which no animal will ever again be the victim of suffering inflicted by humans." That's a laudable goal, one which we humans have failed in accomplishing with regard to suffering inflicted upon each other. The program for that conference included workshops on community and campus organizing, issue overview, legislative

outreach, direct action, media and promotion, fund raising and concluded with action strategy sessions, including one on farm animals. It's interesting to note that the program for the conference indicated that vegetarian lunches and dinners would be served.

Here's what one of the philosophers involved in this issue, Brian Klug of Chicago, had to say in reviewing the CAST report on *Scientific Aspects of the Welfare of Food Animals*¹. He concluded: "The report claims to be scientific. Science should be impartial and disinterested. The character of this report suggests that its purpose is not science, but propaganda on behalf of the close confinement food animal industry."

When this issue broke upon the agricultural scene, LCI called a conference of animal welfarists and representatives of livestock groups. We asked the welfarists to define their concerns and specify alternatives to the systems to which they object. The report on that conference amounts to a list of systems and management practices which concern the welfarists. We were less fortunate, however, in obtaining specifics on the alternatives the welfarists suggest.

That conference was a year ago. More recently, Dr. Mike Fox of the Humane Society of the United States, has refined his concerns with regard to dairy cattle production in a speech to the American Dairy Science Association. Fox said the major problem in dairy herds is a "welfare deficit occurring in larger herds when economic efficiencies necessitate a reduction in the quality and quantity of individual attention." Other problems he listed include:

"1. Transportation of injured and sick cows to slaughter..." The problem of the downer cow is one I've been asked about and which I can find little information on. Are there recommendations on handling of downer cows, how to get them to slaughter and how to decide whether an attempt should be made to salvage them? If there are, I can't find them and would like to have them. If there aren't, isn't this an issue an organization such as yours should address? We can't just respond that we have no problems. When the welfarists highlight one which is real, we must address it, or our credibility suffers with regard to other aspects of the issue.

Returning to Fox's list:

"2. Dehorning calves should include a local anesthetic and the use of caustic chemicals, which can cause eye damage and skin infection, should be prohibited."

"3. Prolonged stanchion-tying of cows, especially in winter months, should be discontinued in favor of the free-stall open-barn system, which has done much to improve the welfare of cows."

Fox lists other concerns. If you're interested, excerpts of that speech², as well as the list of concerns³ regarding all species of farm livestock, are available from LCI. Since the Bovine Practitioners Association is a member of LCI, your requests for copies through that organization will be forwarded to us.

A word about vegetarianism. Dr. Fox denies that he's a vegetarian, rather claims to be an "ethical vegetarian." But

the literature of the organization he works for, a major element in this controversy, contains much vegetarianism. There are many vegetarians involved in this movement, although all the people involved are not. Vegetarians aren't interested in improving farm animal welfare. If they had their way, there would be no farm animals. They are no more interested in improving the welfare of farm animals than are orthodox Jews or Moslems interested in improving swine husbandry. There is a real philosophical question here regarding whether an animal that does not exist is better off than one which exists in a confinement livestock operation.

Perhaps as important as what the animal welfarists are telling us is how they are telling us, how they are getting their message across. They use, are expert at using, all the conventional means of influencing the public on an issue such as this—TV, newspaper editorial columns, popular magazines, documentary movies, use of celebrities, legislative lobbying, advertising, encouragement of legal interest and class action lawsuits, conferences and influence on young people through several programs I'll mention in more detail.

One involves students in colleges of veterinary medicine. I'd suggest that you ask a couple of questions of faculty members at your favorite veterinary college, questions designed to determine how prevalent belief in either the animal rights philosophy or vegetarianism is among their veterinary students. The answers I've received to such questions have prompted me to ask prominent veterinarians if they aren't concerned, since it's their profession. They've indicated they sure are concerned and I'd suggest you might be, as well, if you investigate. You might ask one further question: "What is the faculty doing about this influence on their students?"

Animal welfarists have concluded, correctly, that the most effective means of influencing the public on this issue, over the long term, is by indoctrinating young people. They do this through magazines like *Kind*, published by HSUS, which asked kids in one issue if they "thought about the life of the steer their hamburger came from," and through publications used in schools, like *Scholastic Newstime*, which recently ran an article that was biased against confinement livestock.

But their most ambitious project to propagandize our youth is in the form of a set of curriculum materials for use in pre-school through sixth grade, prepared by an arm of the Humane Society of the United States. You may have heard of the pilot test edition of that curriculum guide. It suggested that teachers ask kindergarten kids: "What animals did you eat today?" or "What animals do you eat the most of?" It was filled with vegetarianism and animal rights philosophy. It was designed to convince school children that there is no difference between their school mates and a pig or cow, that they would have the same reaction to a confined space as a hen and that eating animals is about the same as eating humans. The reaction of teachers, not to mention the reaction of agriculture, was so great that extensive changes were made. Much of the outright promotion of vegetarian-

ism was removed and the animal rights philosophy was toned down. Both still exist in the final edition, however. Although improved, the guide still isn't what you'd like your kids to be taught about animal agriculture. The guide is being widely promoted by animal welfarists for use in schools across the country.

It's safe to predict that they'll be widely adopted in schools in the urban areas of the country. I can almost hear you telling yourself that they won't be used in rural areas, especially in the midwest. Not so.

The country teacher organization in one of the best farming counties in southern Michigan adopted those guides for use in the schools in that county. Farm leaders are now trying to remove them.

I don't suppose you'd call Utah midwest, but it sure isn't what we'd commonly call urban. In the county in which Ogden is located the school district cancelled use of the guides only after the Utah Farm Bureau brought pressure. The editor of the guide, the director of the National Association for the Advancement of Humane Education, says such censorship won't be tolerated. The Farm Bureau had insisted that certain sections of the guide be deleted, contending that those sections shouldn't be taught at all, and that others should be revised or edited. The animal welfarist editor termed the proposed alterations "censorship of ideas which are different from theirs" and said she finds the entire incident "somewhat incredible."

She said her organization won't condone censorship and she won't agree to any changes in the guide. A spokesman for the Ogden Junior League, which promoted use of the guide, says that teaching respect for all living things, plant, animal and human, is essential. She said she is concerned that the Farm Bureau has a profit motive behind its censorship effort.

What are we telling the animal welfarists?

We've tried to convince them of a few simple truths:

That most of the systems used in livestock production were adopted to improve the conditions for the animals, to get them out of the weather, away from predators and parasites, reduce exposure to disease organisms, and improve access to feed and water.

That the best measures of how well systems accomplish those goals are rate of gain, feed efficiency and reproductive efficiency. In addition to those measures, science may provide answers on when animals are under stress, but emotion and anthropomorphic conclusions based on how humans would react to the same set of conditions aren't valid.

That livestock producers discard systems that have a negative effect on animal welfare as measured by performance.

That livestock producers were and continue to be animal welfarists in the truest sense, since the welfare of producers depends, to a great extent, on the welfare of their animals.

We've begun telling them some additional truths based on research, truths which apply specifically to the concerns of the welfarists and expose some of what they consider abuse and deprivation to be no more than emotional myths. For example:

We've heard a great deal about how the crate system of

feeding veal calves is abusive and cruel and amounts to deprivation. One of the concerns in that system is feeding of a liquid diet and we've heard a great deal about the benefits of straw, as bedding, as a nutrient and as a pacifier, if you will.

We've begun testing the alternative, loose-housing system with straw bedding that the welfarists recommend. We're learning a great deal about the system and those of us who weren't familiar with the veal industry are learning a great deal about it. We're learning lessons like:

If the calves get loose from the chains they return to their own stalls. They prefer the stall that's home and don't engage in the kind of social play and carrying on that the welfarists tell us they miss so much.

The straw bedding doesn't promote rumen function, as the welfarists have insisted. In the studies of that system, most calves were found at slaughter to have a mass of undigested straw in their rumen. It appeared that the rumens were non-functional, hardly contributing to improved welfare. As for its contribution as bedding, the straw pack served to drastically change ventilation requirements in the building. Also, producers learned again that a little manure and a lot of straw is a whale of a lot bigger handling problem than just the manure alone. So much for the magic qualities of straw for veal calves.

That manure pack wicked moisture to the surface, the natural ventilation wasn't sufficient to carry it away. During the cold weather we had last winter it rained on the calves inside the building and they all got pneumonia. Then, because they were loose-housed, rather than crated, it was difficult to medicate them and impossible to observe feed consumption at one end or output at the other to monitor their health.

One of the major lessons of that trial and of other experience regarding this issue is that there are very good reasons why livestock producers have adopted the practices and systems they use. We've sometimes forgotten why these systems were adopted, but we're reminded quickly when we test some of the alternatives suggested by the welfarists.

Another example is a preliminary report on one of the many animal welfare research projects under way. Those results indicate that tethered sows are under no more stress than sows in a pen. After a 36 to 48-hour adjustment period, the tethered sows had relatively low levels of the blood hormone cortisol, which is believed to be correlated with the amount of stress an animal is under.

I think we'll be telling them much more in coming months as we obtain more scientific support for livestock production practices. I hope they'll be as willing to listen to us as we've been to listen to them during the past year or two.

Selected References

1. Scientific Aspects of the Welfare of Food Animals, Report No. 91, Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, \$3.50 per copy, CAST, 250 Memorial Union, Ames, Iowa 50011.
2. LCI background paper 82-8-9, Excerpts from presentation by Dr. M. W. Fox to the American Dairy Science Association, Livestock Conservation Institute, 239 Livestock Exchange Building, South St. Paul, MN 55075.
3. LCI report 81-9-4, Report of Conference to Define Farm Animal Welfare Concerns, Livestock Conservation Institute.