

## Executive Summary

Minimum space requirements for animals raised in confined housing have become a major action issue for animal rights groups. Ballot initiatives in Florida (2002) and Arizona (2006) banned the use of gestation stalls for pregnant sows and stall-based growing programs for veal calves. Another veterinary-approved production practice these groups are now targeting is the use of battery cages for egg-laying hens.

## Issue Background

Dating back to the post-World War II era, when personal income and U.S. population both boomed, a trend toward more confined, space-efficient animal production systems emerged. The pork and poultry sectors have seen the most change from the pastoral, barnyard image of the early 20th century to the animal health-conscious systems of today. The most conspicuous change has been moving production of these species almost completely indoors, resulting in less subjection of animals to the environmental extremes faced outdoors. With those environmental-

control changes have come physical confined housing practices, developed hand-in-hand with veterinary and animal health experts to increase both animal welfare and production efficiency.

Confined housing is a complex issue. Groups opposing these proven production practices range from organizations such as the Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS), which promotes vegetarianism on its Web site ([www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org)), to well-meaning mainstream individuals who are easily convinced these practices constitute animal cruelty. Many of the organizations opposing modern production agriculture are well-funded and ex-

Issue Briefing  
Animal Welfare:

## Minimum Space Requirements

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pert at distilling their goals into a powerful yet misleading message: Stop animal cruelty.

In January 2007, Smithfield Foods, the largest hog and pork producer in the U.S., announced a ten-year phaseout of gestation stalls in its company-owned facilities. Less than two weeks later, Maple Leaf Foods, Canada's largest hog producer, made a similar announcement. Conspicuous in both announcements was an acknowledgement that this massive change would be made in deference to perceived public opinion, not because of a change in veterinary opinion as to the welfare effects on their sows.

## AFBF Policy

AFBF Policy 104, Animal Care (excerpted): “We support the right of farmers to raise livestock in accordance with commonly accepted agricultural practices.

“We support vigorous enforcement fines and/or reimbursement for animal research lost and all costs and damage incurred, when farms or research facilities are willfully damaged.

“We are opposed to the concept of animal rights and oppose the expenditure of public funds to promote the concept of animal rights. We support the proper treatment of animals. We oppose laws or regulations elevating the well being of animals to a similar status as the

rights of people. We oppose initiatives, referendums or legislation that create standards above sound veterinary science and best management standards.

“We support the Animal Enterprise Protection Act of 1992 and urge all states to adopt similar statutes.

“We oppose legislation that would give animal rights organizations the right to establish standards for the raising, marketing, handling, feeding, housing or transportation of livestock, horses, poultry, aquaculture, fur bearing, and canine animals. We oppose any laws which would mandate specific farming practices in livestock production.”

## What’s Happening Now?

On the heels of its 2006 victory in Arizona, HSUS seems to be preparing to make Colorado the next target for a ballot initiative, likely in 2008. Colorado is the eighth-largest hog-producing state in the nation. Florida and Arizona were not major pork-producing states at the time of their initiative votes, which makes targeting of Colorado more troublesome. Conventional wisdom suggests a coalition of animal rights groups seeks to parlay a handful of state-level ballot victories into a “mandate” to press for legislation at the federal level.

In New Hampshire, two bills have been introduced in the state legislature this year regarding additional space requirements for laying hens and requiring state institu-

tions to purchase eggs produced by cage-free hens only.

California also is a likely target for ballot initiatives and other measures supported by animal rights activists.

There will be attempts by animal rights groups to include legislative and administrative animal rights initiatives in the final package of the 2007 Farm Bill.

In the last Congress, the Farm Animal Stewardship Purchasing Act (H.R. 5557) was introduced to apply animal care standards to meat that goes into any federal government programs, including the military and the school lunch program. The legislation is expected to be reintroduced this year and pushed by animal rights groups for inclusion in the Farm Bill.

## Economic Analysis

Virtually all commercial pork, poultry and egg production in the U.S. occurs in a confined environment. This is done in the interest of:

- Animal health and well-being,
- Minimizing predation losses,
- Maximizing economic efficiency, and
- Ensuring food security for the nation.

U.S. meat consumers are the primary beneficiaries of the efficiency gains of modern livestock production systems. Under these systems, meat production occurs year-round, not seasonally. By maximizing the number of pigs that survive birth, largely due to farrowing stall technology, today’s hog sector spreads its costs out over more pigs. Economic theory dictates that over time, price moves toward the cost of production. More efficient production, therefore, means a win for consumers who buy meat, milk and eggs.

Looking inside the numbers, the pork and poultry sectors comprise a multi-billion-dollar per year industry and employ hundreds of thousands of employees. Because most processing complexes are located far from major metropolitan areas, many of these plants are significant contributors of property taxes for the rural areas in which they are located. Accordingly, their contributions help pay for schools and other services of local governments. Their employees pay sales and property taxes. In short, the economic activity associated with meat animal production and processing is a major contributor to the future viability of many areas of rural America.

## Public Relations Resources

### Talking Points:

- Farming has changed over the years, and modern confined housing occurs in carefully supervised environments. These environments provide animals with temperature and ventilation controls not found in nature, and nutritious food and clean water are provided in abundance.
- Farmers go beyond their role of humane guardians and show concern for their animals' health and safety. Farmers routinely stay up all night to help sows deliver piglets or to tend to newborn calves.
- Proper care of animals is a time-honored ethic that also makes economic sense. In order for animals to increase efficiencies in meat, milk and egg production, farmers must take all possible steps to ensure their animals are stress-free and well-cared for with proper water, nutrients and shelter.
- Just as meat, eggs, milk and other dairy products have always been part of our mealtime routine, caring for the animals that provide these staples are part of the farmer's daily activities.
- Today's farmers employ the latest proven advances in animal handling, husbandry, health and care. These practices are humane. Livestock groups have developed, and many producers are voluntarily implementing, workable animal care and handling guidelines as part of quality assurance programs. Rigid regulations specifying how farm animals are raised would make farmers less efficient, lead to a greater loss of farmland and increase consumer food costs.
- Legislation and regulations that promote animal rights threaten the ability of farmers and ranchers to care for their livestock according to commonly accepted agricultural practices.

### Public Opinion Research

Despite increasing pressure on livestock producers by animal rights activists, surprisingly little research assessing public perceptions has been conducted to date.

However, Ohio State University researchers prepared a statewide report, "Ohioans' Attitudes About Animal Welfare," based on a 2004 survey of food, agricultural and environmental issues.

Among the findings published in the report, 92 percent of Ohioans agreed or strongly agreed it is important that farm animals are well-cared for, while 81 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the well-being of farm animals is as important

as the well-being of pets. And 75 percent agreed or strongly agreed that even though some farm animals are used for meat, the quality of their lives is important.

In addition, 59 percent of Ohioans said they would be willing to pay more for meat, poultry or dairy products labeled as coming from humanely treated animals.

Please keep in mind these results come from just one survey of residents of one state, Ohio, and may not be representative of other survey results or other parts of the U.S.

For more about this report, visit [http://ohiosurvey.osu.edu/pdf/2004\\_Animal\\_report.pdf](http://ohiosurvey.osu.edu/pdf/2004_Animal_report.pdf).

There is, at present, little public opinion research available to the public about these issues. However, a small number of researchers wrote about stall-size issues in the late 1980s, while HSUS listed concerns about the treatment of dairy cattle several years prior to that.

### Brochure

A brochure, titled "Modern Animal Agriculture," includes information on how livestock production benefits rural communities and describes how farmers and ranchers work to keep their livestock healthy. It's sold in bundles of 100 at [www.fb.org/index.php?fuseaction=materials.brochures](http://www.fb.org/index.php?fuseaction=materials.brochures).

## Legal Analysis

Attempts to impose the anti-meat agenda on the public are not limited to political fights. Anti-meat activists are increasingly filing lawsuits aimed at particular livestock practices. Activists are creative. Small legal victories lead to bigger ones as piecemeal litigation creates a nationwide body of law on animal cruelty. Meanwhile, companies such as Smithfield succumb to activist demands, most recently with the announced phase-out of gestation stalls, without admitting that routine animal husbandry practices are anything but economically, legally and scientifically sound practices.

Please contact your State Farm Bureau when you become aware of lawsuits relating to treatment and animal feelings and rights.

A few examples of current campaigns include:

- Efforts are under way nationwide to eliminate the foie gras industry. Groups have (a) filed nuisance Clean Water Act citizen suits in order to bankrupt New York foie gras producers; (b) successfully lobbied for an ordinance banning the sale of foie gras in Chicago that is now in litigation; and, (c) filed suit in New York seeking a legal determination that foie gras is a diseased,

and therefore adulterated food, that violates state food safety laws. If activists succeed and bad law is made, they will use that victory in their next fight.

- As states pass animal cruelty laws and regulations, activists will likely file legal challenges. An appellate court recently rejected an activist lawsuit in deferring to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's sound scientific judgment that routine animal husbandry practices coupled with proven methods to minimize pain have a valid and legal economic and production value.

## Related Organizations

**Animal Agriculture Alliance**—This organization ([www.animalagriculture.org](http://www.animalagriculture.org)) provides a united voice for advocates of animal agriculture to provide science-based information to a wide audience. It also is the umbrella organization under which AFBF and others monitor and engage the Pew Charitable Trusts' National Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production ([www.ncifap.org](http://www.ncifap.org)).

**American Meat Institute**—The U.S. meat industry has set forth optimal handling procedures for livestock at the following Web site: [www.animalhandling.org/](http://www.animalhandling.org/).

**Farm Animal Welfare Coalition (FAWC)**—AFBF is one of the organizers of the FAWC, an ad hoc coalition of national livestock and livestock-input organizations. This effort, key to congressional successes in the 109th Congress, rec-

ognizes the need for agriculture to speak with a single voice to the government regarding livestock and poultry production.

**NCBA / Beef Checkoff**—The Cattlemen, using Beef Checkoff funds, have established a Web site ([www.beeffrompasturetoplate.org/](http://www.beeffrompasturetoplate.org/)) that provides information about "Beef—From Pasture to Plate."

**National Pork Producers Council**—Pork Producers' Web site ([www.nppc.org/public\\_policy/animal\\_health.html](http://www.nppc.org/public_policy/animal_health.html)) contains information about gestation stalls for sows, foot-and-mouth disease, biosecurity and more.

**United Egg Producers**—The UEP developed a program to help consumers identify eggs produced by farms committed to maintaining high standards. Learn more about the "certified" program at the following Web site: <http://www.uepcertified.com/>.

**United Soybean Board**—The USB has initiated a campaign ([www.animalag.org](http://www.animalag.org)) to educate soybean farmers about the importance of supporting animal agriculture in their communities. The USB's materials include animal welfare issues.

### Additional Resources

Additional information is posted on Farm Bureau's intranet site, SILO, at <http://silofb.org/issues/livestock>. Among the resources posted on the Livestock Issues Management page on SILO are news clips, links to past Issues Management Briefings about related issues and links to agricultural law programs around the U.S. Links to related conference calls and PowerPoint® slide presentations also are posted on this page.