



To Serve And Strengthen Agriculture

NYFB Policy Development 2010

Animal Care: Should government be involved?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Over the past few years animal rights organizations, including the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), have launched efforts to force changes in the care of farm animals. With their representatives publicly stating that there is no humane way to slaughter livestock, these organizations are approaching animal care from a “democratic approach” by establishing specific management practice restrictions in state law. This is in direct conflict to longstanding NYFB policy that animal care standards should not be dictated in statute, but rather based on sound-science and experts in animal welfare.

Animal rights organizations have successfully used rhetoric in several states to restrict specific animal practices, such as the recently passed Proposition 2 in California which bans the use of gestation crates for hogs and cages for the raising of chickens. They are now attempting capitalizing on the lack of voter knowledge about agriculture to force animal care changes in other states. In response two states have moved forward with a proactive approach to addressing animal care.

New York is in a different situation than some other states with these challenges as we currently do not allow citizens, or well funded activist groups, to place ballot questions before the general public in the form of an initiative or referendum.

Ohio

The Ohio legislature recently passed a ballot initiative that will be considered by the general public in November. The initiative would amend the state constitution and calls for the establishment of a Livestock Care Standards Board that would set standards for “the care and well-being of livestock and poultry.” In approving these standards, the board is charged with maintaining food safety, encouraging locally grown and raised food, and protecting Ohio

farms and families. The board would be made up of 13 members including the Commissioner of Agriculture, representatives from family farms and farm organizations, the college of agriculture, consumers, food safety experts, the state veterinarian and a local humane society representative. All members of the Board would be appointed by the governor or legislative leaders. The initiative also gives authority to the Department of Agriculture to administer and enforce the standards established by the Board.

Michigan

This proposal gives regulatory authority to the Department of Agriculture and instills in law various animal care initiatives developed by national livestock groups (for example National Milk’s Farmers Assuring Responsible Management and National Cattleman’s Beef Quality Assurance Program). Under the proposal, the Department of Agriculture would establish a third-party auditing system, paid for by the farmer, to ensure that producers were meeting the required standards. An advisory council would review and make recommendations on changes to the standards and the development of the certification program. The bill would limit the use of any state funds to educate the public on any other animal care standards.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The questions below are intended to spark conversation and possibly policy development resolutions.

- Should NY oversee animal care standards?
- Does it make sense for a Board of experts, appointed by elected officials, to determine animal care standards?
- Should Agriculture and Markets, a government body, have the authority to enforce animal care standards?
- Should New York adopt a third party certification program for animal care standards?

Want to be more involved in deciding this issue? Contact your county Farm Bureau for information on the next Policy Development meeting or visit our web site at www.nyfb.org or call 1-800-342-4143.