

# What Really Matters



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He was treated poorly his entire life, miring in his own wastes and constantly breathing in the stench of ammonia. He was drugged to grow as large as possible, becoming crippled under his own weight. Never was he allowed to enjoy the sunlight or take a breath of fresh air. The nightmare continued as he was prodded with needles and crammed onto a truck.

This may sound like an account from the Holocaust or maybe a prisoner of war biography. However, this is an exaggerated description of the life of a typical pig. This false description is told by members of PETA, or People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Their goal is to get members of the public believe that animal agriculture is cruel, unnecessary and a burden to society. Most agriculturists know that this “Tale of the Evil Pork Producer” is untrue, but consumers are hearing these stories, and sadly, believing them.

Over the past year agriculture has been viciously attacked by our own media. TV commercials show inhumane treatment of farm animals. *TIME* magazine has voiced their opinion against the use of technology on dairy farms, and author Michael Pollan has written books undermining our agricultural practices. It's now time for agriculturists to stand up against these people and set the record straight.

Many of the popular faces defending the Humane Society and PETA have made their decisions standing among concrete, condos and consumers rather than in fields and on farms. They have forgotten that in our country, thanks to efficient agricultural production, we only spend 10 percent of our disposable income on food. If these so-called “inhumane” practices were to be eliminated from the agriculture industry, food prices would soar and so would the number of starving citizens.

Unfortunately, animal rights groups have made their voices heard and have been instrumental in passing legislation against certain agricultural practices. Proposition 2 and similar policies have made it clear that these advocates’ voices are loud and proud when it comes to their misplaced passion for animal treatment. In some states, they have successfully convinced the right people that farm animals are restrained in small, unventilated cages and should instead be free to roam.

Let’s get the facts straight. Animal scientists, veterinarians and on-site experience show that animals kept in housing are generally healthier because they are sheltered. The way they are housed offers higher levels of protection than if they were “cage-free” or “free-range.” Housing is well-ventilated, warm, clean and safe from disease, predators and extreme weather conditions. Sow stalls and hen houses also make breeding and

birthing less stressful on the animals and reduce the chance of the mother harming the newborns. Housing is designed to allow farmers to provide the best animal care possible.

If legislation such as Proposition 2 were to spread out of the Golden State and onto our farms, animal agriculture and our food supply could be in serious danger. Stopping production immediately on all confined beef, swine and dairy feeding operations would eliminate 34 percent of our beef supply, 54 percent of milk produced and nearly 65 percent of all pork. Transitioning to cage-free egg production would undoubtedly cause the cost of eggs to rise by at least 25 percent. Overall, our carbon footprint would also increase, as hens eat 15-25 percent more food and produce fewer and smaller eggs when able to roam freely.

Some extremists also believe that farm animals raised for consumption are given unnecessary medications that could enter the food supply and compromise human health. However, farmers and ranchers argue that removing antibiotics from production agriculture would endanger livestock and cause food prices to rise. These advocates have led the public to believe that we overuse certain stimulants and antibiotics, and as a result, food is tainted with harmful chemicals. In reality, all medications and

enhancements are FDA-approved and time-tested not to endanger our food supply.

Animal rights advocates stress that we stop eating meat altogether in order to protect the environment and enable additional crop production for our food supply. In fact, PETA proclaims, “If anyone wants to save the planet, all they have to do is just stop eating meat. Vegetarianism takes care of so many things in one shot: famine, ecology and cruelty.” They even claim that each vegetarian consumer could save more than 100 animal lives a year!

The truth is, America needs both plants and animals to feed its consumers in the best way possible. About half of the land area in the United States is not suitable for crop production, but it can be used for grazing. This land would be useless as a food resource if it were not consumed by livestock such as cattle, goats and sheep. As a nation, we possess ample amount of cropland to support both feed grains and consumption crops.

Turn on the TV, and you’re sure to see a celebrity informing consumers about cruelty towards farm animals. Open your favorite magazine and you’ll most likely find an article bashing the use of technology or antibiotics on the farm. Take a trip to *Barnes and Noble*.

You'll probably find the title of a book negatively portraying agriculture on the "best sellers" shelf.

On the other hand, donate some canned goods to your local food pantry. More than likely, the grateful recipients won't ask from where it came, if the animals were mistreated, or how much it cost you. For those who are hungry, it is the calories that count, not the details of production. In all reality, those in need couldn't care less about technology or confinement and probably wouldn't ever read "The Tale of the Evil Pork Producer." All they care about is their survival.

Why do we let activists groups win-over the minds of our citizens when it comes to the affordability and availability of our food? The best way to fight back is for farmers to tell their own stories about what is right for production agriculture. Let's not let organizations like PETA claim to be experts in our domain. It's not the cage, the injection, or the sunlight that matters, its feeding families that counts.

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