



Human Society forges ahead with ‘animal care’ push across the U.S.

By Stewart Doan

© Copyright Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc.

Washington, Jan. 22 – The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) isn’t giving up its fight to improve the treatment of farm animals. Seemingly unfazed by Ohio voters’ approval on Nov. 3 of Issue 2, HSUS, the nation’s largest animal protection organization, says it remains committed to working for “real reform” of animal agriculture handling and production practices in Ohio and throughout the country.

“Our efforts in 2010 will continue to center around ensuring that farm animals are able to stand up, lie down, turn around, and extend their limbs,” said Paul Shapiro, senior director of HSUS’s Factory Farming Campaign. “We will also be seeking to work with industry in order to phase out routine dairy cow tail-docking.” Shapiro declined to identify which states are on the organization’s radar screen.

Maine and Michigan passed laws in 2009 to phase out confinement practices, after HSUS negotiated with ag leaders in the states. It approached several other states regarding animal care, most recently Minnesota in December.

“The animal rights movement, I think, has become the greatest threat from the broad anti-technology movement against agriculture,” says Steve Kopperud, executive vice president of Policy Directions, Inc., a Washington, DC government affairs firm, who has monitored the activities of animal rights groups for over 20 years. ‘It would be incredibly naïve to ignore the threat or to think this is a one-battle war and once you beat them the first time, they’re going to go away and never come back.’”

In Ohio, a broad coalition of state agriculture groups took ownership of the farm animal care issue and spearheaded passage of a ballot initiative that created a 13-member Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board. Their campaign cost approximately \$5 million. The coalition, Ohioans for Livestock Care, waited fewer than 24 hours after Election Day to begin planning for 2010. “[HSUS] has done some preliminary things through the Secretary of State’s office that they need to enable them to collect signatures and to take steps to pursue a ballot initiative” in November of this year, according to Jack Fisher, executive vice president of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation. (For more of Fisher’s comments, go to www.Agri-Pulse.com and listen to his Open Mic interview.)

While HSUS has yet to publicly say whether it will launch a ballot initiative, President and CEO Wayne Pacelle signaled on Election Night 2009 that the fight wasn't over. **“Now that the Issue 2 campaign is over, we can get on with real reform. . . We decided to spend nearly no money against Issue 2 and to reserve our energy and resources for an effort to promote the humane treatment of animals, protect food safety and the environment, and allow Ohio farmers to remain competitive in the decades ahead,”** Pacelle said.

Jamie Butts, executive director of the Ohio Soybean Association, another member of the pro-Issue 2 coalition, describes HSUS' approach as narrow – focusing only on how some farm animals are raised – and says the group needs to step back and give the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board time to work.

“We think it is unfortunate that the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has already threatened to bring its California-style extreme housing measure to Ohio this year,” says Butts, who adds, **“Their actions to date show total disregard for the voters of Ohio and what they have said about farm animal care in our state.”**

In 2010, Missouri is the setting for an HSUS-led ballot initiative campaign – this one to crack down on so-called “puppy mills.” Missouri leads the nation in the number of operations breeding dogs for commercial sale.

HSUS has gotten approval to circulate its petition in the state. They need about 100,000 signatures statewide to place it on the ballot in November.

The pet industry today, livestock farms tomorrow – that's what Charlie Kruse, president of the Missouri Farm Bureau Federation, fears HSUS is attempting to do in his state. “We're quite concerned about what's going on and we're certainly going to do everything we can to educate people both in the urban areas and in the rural areas.”

Kopperud agrees it's in the best interest of Missouri agriculture to align itself with the American Kennel Club and other opponents of the proposed ballot initiative, telling *Agri-Pulse*, **“It is no longer a luxury for legitimate animal users to sit on the sidelines and watch others get picked off.”**

HSUS, which has a lobbying presence in over 40 states, is also flexing its muscle in state legislatures. Three months after it exposed cruelty at a Vermont dairy calf processing plant, State Senator Harold Giard, vice chairman of the Vermont Senate Agriculture Committee introduced legislation on Jan. 5 **requiring that HSUS and other like-minded organizations be present when livestock are slaughtered.**

“An inspector who is a representative of the Humane Society of the United States, a Vermont-domiciled humane society, or similar organization...shall be present to observe a slaughterer, packer, or stockyard operator when engaged in the practice of bleeding or slaughtering livestock,” the bill states. “An inspector shall immediately notify” Vermont's secretary of agriculture of “any alleged violation.”

If enacted, slaughter houses and livestock sale barns accused of violating the law would be closed for 30 days pending the outcome of an investigation. Violators could be fined up to \$5,000 and imprisoned for up to three months.

“This is the first time I’ve ever seen, essentially, a state even contemplate the notion of turning over the fate of an industry to a humane organization,” warns Kopperud.

For other *Agri-Pulse* news stories, go to: www.agri-pulse.com.

#30