

Animal Welfare

I recently spent a few days in Des Moines, Iowa becoming officially trained and certified in animal care and well-being. Having devotedly raised a diversity of creatures my entire life, I am somewhat mystified that individuals and organizations, who know nothing about livestock, would require one such as I to become “certified”. America’s farmers and ranchers spend countless hours, day and night, working for the comfort, safety and welfare of their animals. Long before there were activist groups telling us how to farm, caring producers championed the humane treatment of animals because it was the right thing to do. After all, happy cows are more productive cows, and happy cows enhance the economic wellbeing of their owners and caretakers.

For individuals involved in animal agriculture, the daily enhancement of livestock, dairy and poultry wellbeing is a basic component of animal husbandry. This includes housing, breeding, nutrition, routine and extraordinary veterinary care, handling and transportation. Respecting the wellbeing of our animals is not only ethically correct, it is also in the economic best interest of all livestock, dairy and poultry producers, our families and the rural communities in which we live. This dedication continues to provide American consumers the best, safest and most abundant food supply the world has ever known.

Agricultural organizations such as the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), National Cattlemen’s Beef Assn. (NCBA), the National Milk Producers Federation (NPMF), the United Egg Producers (UEP), the Artisan Farmers Alliance (AFA), and the American Quarter Horse Assn. (AQHA), share a common concern that the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and other national animal rights groups are demanding a so-called “animal welfare” title in the 2007 Farm Bill. It seems obvious to these groups that such legislation is unnecessary and redundant to existing on-farm, producer-developed wellbeing programs, as well as to existing federal and state regulations.

A recent hearing (May 8, 2007) on the welfare of animals in agriculture, held in the House Committee on Agriculture’s Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy & Poultry demonstrates that producers have been proactive in ensuring the humane treatment of animals by implementing industry-led standards and guidelines based on the latest scientific recommendations for animal welfare management systems. Those who work with and care for animals, day in and day out, know best how to provide animal care and treatment practices, not activists. The animal rights activists want to be a part of the farm bill process in an effort to legitimize their efforts and be seen by the public and Congress as mainstream. This potential recognition would only further their assault on animal agriculture and other legitimate animal use industries. To many agriculturists, it appears the underlying goal is not humane treatment of animals, but an eventual end to all animal use.

At the above mentioned hearing, producers and officers laid out in detail, decades of individual and collective program development aimed at maintaining and enhancing the wellbeing of the animals in the care farmers and ranchers. The hearing showed the dangers to farming and ranching that results from emotion-based decisions. Science,

research, and actual on-farm experience are the best criteria in determining how best to care for and treat food producing animals.

Hopefully, these demonstrated proactive efforts dramatically provided to the Committee compelling evidence that a separate Farm Bill title to appease the animal rights movement is unnecessary and redundant to existing protections. Embracing the animal rights legislative agenda works against the best interests of all of us, producers, consumers, and animals.

A specific example of agricultures efforts to enhance animal care is Pork Quality Assurance Plus (PQA Plus), which will officially be launched during World Pork Expo next month. PQA Plus is the result of work by a coalition of participants from throughout the pork chain. The fundamental concepts of this program are designed to be sustainable, creditable, workable, and affordable for all segments of the food chain. Extremism is not needed. Successful completion, and regular renewal, of the twelve step PQA Plus program is designed to protect the integrity of pork producers and to promote a positive image to consumers.

Animal producers take the welfare of animals in their charge seriously. We have the knowledge, expertise, experience and interest in providing the best for our livestock and poultry. We will continue to work within our particular areas of expertise, along with veterinarians, scientists, researchers, behaviorists, and reasonable regulators to develop and implement the very best standards for the animals in our care. We are continually working to improve methods as new science and technology becomes available and as economics allow. Initiatives and best management practices that are created and implemented by agriculturists are working.