

## Proposition 2

California's Proposition 8 has generated a lot of acrimony in recent weeks. Proposition 2, titled "Treatment of Farm Animals Statute", which California voters passed with 63% of the vote, is generating much worry and trepidation in agricultural circles. Sponsors of California's recently passed animal-welfare initiative are pledging to take the initiative nationwide. Experience shows that animal-rights activists have deep pockets and persistent recruits. Groups who know nothing about the process of raising animals are forcing unreasonable standards on those who work hard to feed us.

Prop 2 creates a new state statute that prohibits the confinement of farm animals in a manner that does not allow them to fully extend their limbs or turn around freely without touching the sides of an enclosure. The specific ban outlaws dense confinement for egg-laying poultry, gestation crates for sows and veal crates for calves. A misdemeanor penalty and a fine of up to \$1,000 or imprisonment in the county jail for up to six months are imposed for farmers who are found violating the act.

A recent economic study at the University of California-Davis predicts that passage of this measure will effectively ban all commercial egg production in California by 2015, cause a loss of almost 3,400 jobs, and a cost of \$615 million to the state's economy. This same study concluded California consumers would potentially pay 25% more for eggs, and that impact certainly will not stop at state lines.

Even Governor Schwarzenegger opposed passage of Proposition 2, calling it risky, dangerous and costly. He contended that food safety and public health are jeopardized, virtually eliminating California's access to locally grown, fresh eggs, and consumers are harmed by higher prices at grocery stores and restaurants. He warned that passage of Prop 2 would create a dependency on eggs shipped from other states and Mexico, which would be more exposed to salmonella and increase vulnerability to bird flu. Schwarzenegger was joined by nearly every major daily California newspaper—28 total—in opposing Prop 2, but still it passed.

Currently, California poultry farmers are allowed to raise chickens in "battery cages". These are stacked wire enclosures where laying hens have constant access to feed, clean water, controlled lighting, monitored ventilation and comfortable temperatures. With all the comforts of life, hens are extremely productive. Their eggs are collected immediately after they are laid, cleaned, checked for quality, packaged and cooled.

One wonders why Prop 2 was needed when more than 85 percent of US egg production is already certified by an independent scientific committee as meeting the animal welfare guidelines established for Egg Producers. According to the United Egg Producers, about 30 California farms produce most of the state's annual 5 billion egg harvest, an average of more than 600,000 hens per farm. They could never be this efficient with "free-ranging" chickens or even with hens housed in coops like our grandparents used to have.

Should attempts be made to stay in business and maintain current levels of egg production, California poultry farmers would be obligated to build 8 to 16 times more hen houses to comply with requirements of the new law. Finding the capital and the land would be a monumental challenge that

most egg farmers would not be able to handle. Third generation poultry man Ryan Armstrong of Armstrong Egg Farms of Southern California said; "The proposal, pure and simple, will put us out of business." All this comes at a time when families are struggling with rising food prices. Supporters of the measure, including the Humane Society of the United States, Farm Sanctuary, and The Fund for Animals, naively believe farm animals should be treated like people. They contend that family farms were driven out of business, accusing larger more efficient farms of cutting corners and putting profits ahead of animal welfare. Unfortunately, their real agenda is to totally terminate specialized animal agriculture. I wonder how many of these proponents spend their days housed in a tiny office cubicle and then crowd onto a bus or subway to get home to a small apartment, all in the name of efficiency and frugality.

It is interesting how we complain about our dependency on foreign sources for oil, but think nothing of forcing the production of food to other locations. One day, perhaps, our society will appreciate the blessing of an abundant and safe supply of food. Until then we will let organizations like the Humane Society feed us emotional and misleading propaganda. The passage of Prop 2 show that the voters are influenced more by the flames of emotionalism, fanned by skilled alarmists, than by proven economics and established methods of animal husbandry.