



Animal Care: What Happened?

In December 2008, Michigan farming industry representatives met to discuss what options were available to thwart a rumored ballot initiative that could have resulted in hampering the economic survivability of animal agriculture production in Michigan. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has successfully captured over 60 percent of the votes in every state where it has attempted an animal care initiative—most recently in California. HSUS is very clever, and it has the ability to raise far more money than we could ever muster to promote a point of view. Successful ballot initiatives that restrict housing options for egg, pork and veal producers led HSUS to openly discuss its next targets. Michigan was one of the states mentioned.

At the time, we correctly anticipated that the targeted producer groups would have been the same here in Michigan as they had been in other states; however, an initiative would have affected all producer groups to a greater or lesser degree. Because of the threat this posed for all segments of agriculture, all segments united to work together in Michigan, hoping we could generate a more positive outcome than would result from a HSUS led ballot initiative. The agricultural interests decided the only chance we had to gain the outcome we all desired was to take a legislative approach. We decided to collectively work toward that goal.

The various animal production groups agreed to use the appropriate care guidelines

embraced by each of their groups as the basis for legislation that, if enacted into law, would become mandatory care guidelines for all producers to follow. In dairy's case we would follow the guidelines found in the "National Dairy Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM)" being developed by the National Milk Producers Federation. *More information on FARM can be found on page 11 of this issue.*

We were able to get reasonable legislation written and introduced in the Michigan House of Representatives this summer. The legislation addressed animal care questions consumers have raised and provided for a periodic review and update of care guidelines. However, it didn't address the concerns of everybody, particularly HSUS, other animal activist groups, and some members of

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Outcome of Swine and Egg Industry Negotiations

Early this fall, Michigan's swine and egg production industries made a calculated call to meet with the HSUS and discuss what might be able to be resolved through legislation to avoid a ballot initiative.

The two sides met, without other agricultural groups that had been involved in the larger discussions, because swine and egg production are the main two industries targeted by HSUS, and are the industries that would have to make production changes.

Negotiations between HSUS and the egg and swine industries commenced, and spread over a period of weeks. There was no legislative involvement in these discussions by either political party, nor the larger, all-species agricultural group.

After several conference calls, clarifications, and some minor tweaking of the draft substitute, the Michigan Pork Producers Association and Michigan Allied Poultry Association endorsed a compromise agreement with the HSUS.

Specifically, the agreement does several things. Below is a comparison of the legislative agreement with the proposed ballot initiative to provide a comparison of the two proposals:

	Legislation	Ballot Initiative
Phase in of practices	10 years	6 years
Space per laying hen	1.0 Square Feet	1.5 Square Feet
Administration	Michigan Dept. of Ag	Prohibits MDA actions
Violations	Civil Action	Criminal Complaint
Legislative Basis	Animal Industry Act	Penal Code
Structure	Legislation*	Constitutional Amendment

**Legislation may be changed by the legislature, but a constitutional amendment requires a vote of the people*

National Dairy FARM Program Launch

NMPPF, with support from Dairy Management, Inc. (DMI), formally launched the National Dairy FARM Program: Farmers Assuring Responsible Management during the 2009 World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wis., unveiling key components of the voluntary, nationwide program designed to bring consistency and uniformity to animal care through education, on-farm evaluations and objective third-party verification.

“Dairy farmers are passionate about the care they provide to their animals. The National Dairy FARM Program takes that producer passion and quantifies it to tell the story of dairy animal care to our customers and consumers,” said Jamie Jonker, vice president of scientific and regulatory affairs at NMPPF.

“This is a very thorough program that was created with input from all sectors of the dairy industry, including producers, veterinarians and other animal care

experts. It includes current best practices, innovations, and advances in technology.”

The dairy industry has an excellent track record of responsible management practices, said Jonker. “This program simply offers producers an avenue to demonstrate and validate their commitment to doing what’s right,” he said.

Jonker provided an overview of the program and the National Dairy FARM Program Animal Care Manual, which details best management practices for a variety of issues, including animal health, facilities and housing, animal nutrition, and transportation and handling. The content of the manual is consistent with the principles and guidelines of the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative, which was introduced in 2008.

Participating producers will be provided with training materials that include a comprehensive animal care resource manual, a

quick-reference user guide, an animal care instructional video, and other educational materials. An on-farm instructor may be available from a producer’s cooperative or other source, said Jonker.

Through a statistical sampling, a certain number of participating dairy farms will be randomly selected for third-party verification.

On-farm evaluations will begin in 2010; third-party verification will follow in 2011, said Jonker.

To participate, producers, co-ops, processors, and state and regional dairy producer organizations can contact NMPPF. Costs of the program are still being determined. Implementation of the program, including cost, will depend on whether participants join the program through a co-op or proprietary processor, or as an individual producer.



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the environmental community. The combined efforts of these groups created enough controversy in the Michigan House of Representatives to result in the animal production groups being informed that unless we all could compromise, the legislation would not be brought up for a vote.

We were then at an impasse, because none of us were even sure what some of the other groups involved wanted to see changed in the legislation. But the clock was still ticking. HSUS had let it be known that it was going to start collecting signatures for a ballot initiative starting the first weekend in October if we couldn’t reach agreement. The egg and pork producers, knowing that they had the most to lose in a ballot initiative, started negotiating with

HSUS to gain a better outcome for their industries than what would result from a ballot initiative. HSUS promised that as a result of the agreement there would be no ballot initiative at this time.

I wish we could have been successful in our original intent to pass legislation that is user-friendly to everyone. HSUS, however, is a well-run organization, and we fully understand the implications for our fellow animal industry members. They didn’t have many choices. Although they are not happy with the results, they were at least able to avoid the alternative.

So where does that leave the dairy industry? Some questioned why we were involved in efforts to impose more regulations on ourselves when we weren’t even the target this time. That is a fair

question. The answer is that not only do these initiatives impact all areas of agriculture, but also we have to prepare for what lies ahead. We recognize the need, at some point in the future, to provide the people to whom we sell our milk assurances that we do treat our dairy animals in a responsible manner. We have fielded questions already about whether or not MMPA members have protocols in place for proper treatment of their cows.

When National Milk Producers Federation publishes the final rules of the National Dairy FARM program, we will study them to decide whether or not we can expect the members of MMPA to cost-effectively adopt those guidelines on our farms.

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