

6-23-03

Dr. Nancy Halpern, Director
Division of Animal Health
New Jersey Department of Agriculture
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Dear Dr. Halpern,

I am writing about the 1996 State of New Jersey legislation requiring the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to produce "standards for the humane raising, keeping, care, treatment, marketing, and sale of domestic livestock." With this unique legislative mandate, New Jersey has the unique opportunity to become the first state in America to prohibit the use of cruel factory farming practices.

I urge you to rethink your proposed standards regarding the "humane" treatment of farm animals. Increasingly, these animals are kept on gigantic, industrialized farms that harm humans and animals. I have many concerns about such farms including their blatant disregard for animal welfare, which I fear your proposed standards allow. I encourage you to redress this problem and to rewrite your standards.

I urge you to outlaw inhumane systems that have been outlawed in other countries such as veal crates, battery cages, and gestation crates. These systems are very inhumane and cruel to animals that feel pain and emotions just as humans do. Animals on factory farms suffer immeasurably as they are crowded together for their artificially short lifetimes, fed unnatural diets, trucked all over the state, and killed in inhumane fashion. As a veterinarian I have visited many factory farms and have been appalled by the conditions and state of health of the animals. All animals, including farm animals, have feelings, and they should be protected from cruelty. But, unfortunately, cows, pigs, chickens, and other animals are treated like unfeeling "tools of production" on industrialized factory farms, and they are forced to endure inhumane and intolerable conditions.

Aside from the fact that intensive confinement agriculture is cruel and inhumane, it also poses serious risks to human health.

It is a well-known fact that when animals are kept in close quarters sharing water and feces, they have a much greater risk of contracting and spreading foodborne pathogens. For example, about two-thirds of chickens carry campylobacter. Being only carriers, chickens infected with the organism show no signs of illness. Campylobacter can be easily spread from bird to bird through a common water source or through contact with infected feces. When slaughtered, campylobacter can then be transferred from the intestines of the infected bird to the meat. Although not as well known to the public as salmonella, campylobacter causes 2 million human illnesses annually, of which about

500 are fatal. Unless carefully treated, chicken manure carries salmonella, campylobacter, and other infectious organisms.

Another serious health concern related to factory farming is the potential for antibiotic resistance in humans. In 1997, an event long feared by the medical community finally occurred. In geographically separate patients, a potentially deadly bacterium, *Staphylococcus aureus*, stopped responding to its only known treatment, the antibiotic vancomycin. Antibiotic-resistant strains occur because of the overuse of antibiotics mainly from antibiotics used in animal agriculture. This practice is intended to reduce illness in crowded conditions and accelerate animal growth rates. If more humane conditions existed in farming livestock, antibiotic use would diminish, as would the likelihood of antibiotic resistance among humans.

I urge you to ignore the vested interest groups whose only concern is money and see to it that standards are drafted and implemented that would alleviate the above-described conditions. Both humans and animals will benefit from such action.

Sincerely,

Jean Greek, DVM