

Armies of Animal Agriculture

There is no doubt the animal rights movement is perhaps the biggest threat to animal agriculture. The unending attacks on the safe and effective technologies used on a daily basis to feed this country and a good chunk of the world are the stuff of daily newsletters and the six o'clock news. The animal agriculture industry holds meeting after meeting, seminar after seminar, and chats incessantly on the Internet, engaging in collective hand-wringing over the "threat." Well, the threat is now reality. Animal agriculture is under attack; it's beginning to lose battles and is at risk of losing the war.

The lead player in the axis of animal rights idiocy is the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), ably commanded by the savvy, telegenic Wayne Pacelle. The largest animal rights group in the world – despite its claims to be "animal protection" – has declared war on U.S. animal agriculture and has the war chest, the foot soldiers, and the media machine to achieve its goals if ineffectively challenged.

First there was the HSUS-led Florida referendum in 2002, and two pork producers are out of business. Industry didn't step up. Then came Arizona in 2004, and we rallied too late and used business-as-usual tactics to try and stop HSUS' well-funded, emotion-driven campaign that made it illegal to house swine in gestation crates and laying hens in cages. The Oregon legislature, swayed by the emotion of the animal rights movement's pleas and an absence of convincing industry opposition, ignored the desires of the Oregon voters in a previously failed statewide referendum and banned these same swine and poultry production systems. Colorado producers surrendered without a fight. And then there is California.

California's Proposition 2 was the equivalent of a political mugging. While industry tried to appeal to the minds of California voters, HSUS went straight for their hearts. Industry talked lost jobs and imported eggs; HSUS showed

pictures of abused animals. And nearly \$3.5 million in industry spending later, we are picking up the pieces.

Ground zero in the 2010 election is Ohio. HSUS has already told the Buckeye aggies they have three options: get on the bus and change how they operate; get out of the way of the bus and let HSUS work its magic in the state legislature; or get run over by the bus when HSUS launches another state referendum. So far, Ohio is hanging tough. So far.

In Washington, DC, HSUS has been less successful and this explains, in part, why it has shifted its focus to state campaigns. Reports are HSUS now has a "presence" in more than 30 states – either contract lobbyists or physical offices and staff. The political targets are gestation crates and cages, or what HSUS considers to be the greatest sins of animal ag. The secondary target is a rewrite of state anti-cruelty laws to not only create felony penalties, but to remove exemptions enjoyed by farmers and ranchers for traditional agriculture practices.

HSUS worked unsuccessfully to make horse slaughter in the United States illegal, ironic since Montana just enacted legislation to make horse slaughter legal. It's worked equally hard to make the transport of horses for export – if the animal is heading for slaughter in Canada or Mexico – illegal. No matter these efforts led to 110,000-plus abandoned and neglected horses in the United States alone, hence the Montana action. HSUS successfully petitioned the U.S. Department of Agriculture to write regulations to a 1870s law forbidding animals to be transported more than 28 hours without rest and relaxation. And it salivates over the prospect of a bill to make it illegal for the federal government to buy any meat, milk, or eggs from a farm or ranch that doesn't practice "animal welfare" the way HSUS defines the term.

Farmers, ranchers, and the industries that rely upon efficient food production

are waking up to the need for action. Across the country, there's energy to do battle with the HSUS juggernaut. This is the good news. The challenge is getting everyone in the same boat and rowing in the same direction.

The first line of offense in Washington, DC, is the Farm Animal Welfare Coalition (FAWC), an alliance of the nation's largest producer, input, and service groups, including the National Renderers Association. Time after time it's been shown that when all of animal ag comes together, it's a force that must be reckoned with.

FAWC is a successful remnant of the animal rights battles of the 1990s, reinvented for the challenges of 2009 and beyond. The coalition exists to coordinate federal strategies to oppose legislation and regulation that work against the interests of animal agriculture. I coordinate the group.

Thanks to FAWC's efforts, no animal rights legislation made it into the 2008 farm bill. The group effectively stymied anti-horse slaughter efforts. And it successfully ensured the last Congress did not do harm to animal agriculture; it is gearing up to ensure the same outcome in the new Congress.

FAWC is about to launch a Web site to help state organizations not only learn what's happening in other states, but to provide state grassroots networks with tools to help them fight their battles locally and on a national level. The coalition tracks the animal rights/anti-ag technology movement and reports to its members the developments and intelligence on not only what's happening, but what's likely to happen. FAWC is working with members of Congress to create the Congressional Animal Welfare Caucus to facilitate education efforts on Capitol Hill and to provide a forum for getting the truth about modern animal agriculture to members of Congress. The goal: When bad legislation is introduced or hits the floor of either chamber, uninformed votes

leading to unintentional consequences are avoided.

FAWC is willing and able to help individual states create their own coalitions. It is critical that commodity battles over market share, labeling, etc., be set aside to create a strong, unassailable, and united front. The hard truth is this: Market share battles won't mean a whole lot if there's no market to share.

Perhaps the most aggressive and purest grassroots producer organization is American Farmers for the Advancement and Conservation of Technology (AFACT), at www.itisafact.org. Organized by a handful of frustrated dairy farmers, AFACT welcomes support from all segments of agriculture, but limits the influence of the corporate side of the industry. AFACT was born out of frustration over increasing attacks on the use of safe, approved, and effective technology, and the group has fought battles over bovine somatotropin (BST) use and state labeling laws, surprising the heck out of some dairy processors that want to sell non-BST milk at a premium price, leading customers to believe it's somehow safer or better than conventional milk.

AFACT is growing quickly as producers across the country learn there is a place to go to direct their energies on a state level. The group will hold its annual meeting in late July in Minneapolis, MN, and has tacked on an extra day for a seminar designed to help focus energies on tasks needed to effectively, efficiently, and economically do battle with animal rightists.

The goal here is simple: Agriculture must reconnect with consumers to reinforce the trust and confidence enjoyed for decades. The consumer must understand there are real, live people who produce the safe, abundant, and affordable food we all enjoy. The consumer must also understand that what at first glance are "humane" choices, in fact, work against farmers and ranchers and against affordable food.

Animal agriculture has allowed the animal rights movement to redefine who it is and what it does. If we don't begin direct messaging to the folks who buy our products – whether global fast food chains or the single mother of two on a limited budget – we will ultimately lose. It's time to take back the issue. **R**

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