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Impact of Animal Rights Groups on Commercial Poultry Production

Kenneth E. Anderson
Department of Poultry Science

The world we live in is changing rapidly and in many cases we wonder if the changes are for the better. The industries which some of us have worked in for the greater portion of our lives are coming under attack by individuals who have no interest in our industries other than they come in direct conflict with their beliefs and philosophies.

Today's production agricultural sector directly involves approximately 2,000,000 people and standing in opposition to the production agriculture of today are approximately 2,000,000 people. The problem is these individuals and organizations are very well funded through donations, all of their efforts are focused on one agenda item, and they locate their offices in the capital of this nation so their constant flow of rhetoric will have the greatest impact on the congress and regulatory agencies.

What is wrong with this picture? Those of us that have been involved with poultry for an extended period of time look at our production practices as tools that make the environment the best it can be for the birds that we work with, however, everything we do is now being criticized as being cruel to the animal. To address these criticisms, each of the national organizations have developed welfare guidelines, which includes the National Chicken Council, United Egg Producers, and the National Turkey Federation. In addition, most of the food service industries have also established welfare guidelines that they are requiring that their suppliers follow.

Another question we have to ask ourselves, "are we blameless for the response we have seen from consumers and the food service industries?". There is an old saying that if you point a finger in blame there are three pointing back at you. We have to realize that there are people in our industries that exploit their animals in a manner which may be and in some cases is abusive. We need to remember that this minority has been and continues to be the black eye in each of the industries we serve. Fortunately this is very small minority, but they are projected as the norm in the industry.

There are three definitions we need to examine when we discuss the animal rights issue; 1) Animal welfarist, is one who is concerned for the well being and health of animals and wants assurances that they are humanely treated; 2) Animal rightist, is an individual who believes that animals possess the same rights as humans and should not be exploited; 3) Animal liberationist is one who believes that animals should be released into the natural environment regardless of the means. Those of us in production

agriculture would agree to the first definition which sets the stage for our perspective on the care we provide to the birds under our control. The other two definitions in most peoples minds go too far from the order of nature. In order to understand the other two groups we need to know the basis from which they come. The animal rights and liberationists are based upon the philosophical view that animals should not be used for the production or consumption of animals for food, fibre, research, education, transportation, recreation, exhibition, or even as pets.

These groups are located in all 50 states and are by in large well funded, tax exempt organizations. Some are even funded by the United Way. These organizations include People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Animal Liberation Front (ALF), North Carolina Network for Animals, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), and Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). Some of these groups do conduct some programs which are a service to society by working to adopt out stray or abandoned animals. However if you look below the surface their board of directors have the same individuals on them, and in their mission statements they place humans and animals on the same level. My personal experience with the HSUS indicates that they are closely aligned with the group United Poultry Concerns (UPC), a rights group out to undermine the poultry industry.

There are many participants in the process governing animal welfare in the US. These participants include the government both state and federal, industries, scientists, and the most vocal component the public which should include you.

The foundation of the animal rights movement began in the UK in the early 1960s with the publication of the book "Animal Machines" by Ruth Harrison, which was followed by the Brambell Report out of the House of Commons. The initial movements began in the us in 1966 with the passage of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). Then with the formation of the vocal groups in the US they made a concerted effort to create a public perception that they were looking out for the welfare of the animal not the farmers or producers. Their initial acts of protests, assaults, and vandalism garnered publicity and in some cases a great deal of public support. Especially from the Silver Springs Monkey videos on head injury research. During this same time the animal agriculture sector did not really believe that they were in danger of being targeted since they did such a good job of producing food. In addition, we didn't believe that these groups could ever organize into cohesive groups to create problems for production animal agriculture.

Time has proven that we were wrong in the approach that we took and not being pro-active in addressing animal care. Take a look on the internet. Who's interested in animal rights? I did a quick search and came up with 2.3 million hits in those key words. Who is interested in animal care? I did another quick search and came up with 2 million hits in those key words. Last but not least Who is interested in animal welfare? I did a quick search and came up with 743,000 hits in those key words. So who is interested in animal rights? It appears that a great many people are, and I will assure you that most of them do not understand nor do they care about animal agriculture. Another change which has occurred in the animal rights arena is the linking of animal rights groups with environmental and vegetarian groups. These groups have moved into new approaches; first, is terrorism right now ALF and ELF perpetrate 1 act / week resulting in damages of \$47,400 damages. They burn down egg plants, production houses, and research facilities.

In addition, they have become very good at lobbying, getting congressmen to propose laws, and invading the school systems.

In the future we will not be able to operate as we did in the past. There are new animal care guidelines created by the commodity organizations outlining accepted animal husbandry practices. These guidelines are being used by food service companies to create certification programs by which all the animal products they purchase must be produced using these practices. In order to ensure that the animals are being cared for properly these food service companies are conducting on site audits or hiring individuals to do it for them. Those of us in production animal agriculture need to change our attitudes. We need to continue to develop our own animal care guidelines and they need to be followed. This means ostracizing those producers who do not. We also need to communicate with the consumer and educate them so they understand where their food comes from and how it gets to their table. The consumer needs to know that we care about the welfare of the animals and that they have a good living environment for the time they are alive. In many cases it would be good if our care exceeded the expected. We need to abandon the attitude that our way is the only way. The way my father cared for chickens in my youth was fine at the time but times change and we need to change with them.

The animal rights groups have a long list of practices which they will get to in time. Right now they are concentrating on Molting and cage density in the egg industry. Don't let this fool you; the turkey industry practices of toe and beak trimming, culling and bird density are on the list; in the broiler industry its feed restriction, density, and dubbing; the organic producers, face concerns over healthcare issues and access to the outdoors; for bird transport companies, its loading equipment and transport trucks; hatcheries cull chick and poult disposal, and disposal of live embryos. Finally it's the Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) issue which is has a great deal of misinformation attached to it.

The closing message is to get involved . If we let these thing be dictated to us the life of the producer will never be the same again. Typically, it will not necessarily be for the better. Remember one of the goals of these groups is the elimination of animal agriculture. They will do whatever it takes to achieve this including vandalism, arson, intimidation, assault, and murder.

The impact of Animal Rights Groups on Commercial Poultry Production

Kenneth E. Anderson
Professor of Poultry and Food Science
Chair, NCSU-IACUC Committee

Animal Welfarist

- One who is concerned for the well being and health of animals, and wants assurances that animals are humanely treated

Animal Rightist

- One who believes that animals possess the same inherent rights as humans and should not be exploited
- Do animals have rights?

Animal Liberationist

- Individual who believes that animals should be released from confining situations
 - Animals should be able to pursue natural behaviors
 - Have access to a "natural" environment

Participants in the Process

The animal rights groups are based upon the philosophical views of individuals who do not agree to the production or consumption of animals for food, research, education, transportation, recreation, exhibition, or even as pets

Animal Rights groups in North Carolina

- North Carolina Network for Animals
 - Funded through United Way
- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
 - Non profit
 - \$3 to 5 million annual budget
 - ALF
- American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
 - \$11.2 million budget

Animal Rights groups in North Carolina

- Humane Society of the United States
 - \$7.7 million budget
- Greenpeace
 - \$7.7 million annual budget
 - ELF
- Friends of Animals
 - \$3.5 million budget

Participants in the Process

- Government
 - USDA-FSIS
 - USDA-APHIS
 - FDA
- Industries
 - Commodity Organizations
 - Poultry Companies
 - Producers
- Scientists
 - Extension
 - FASS
 - PSA
- Public
 - Animal-Centric Organizations
 - PETA
 - UPC
 - AHA
 - HSUS
 - Health Care Consumers
 - Animal Agriculture Consumers

The Past



Foundation of Animal Rights

- Brambell Report 1964
- Laws, Regulations, and Policies
 - These committees were established in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act (1966, 1970) and the 1976, 1985, and 1990 AWA Amendments
 - Mice, Rats, and Birds were originally excluded from the act
 - 1999 a petition was filed with the USDA Secretary of Agriculture to remove this exclusion
 - Helms amendment to the 2002 Ag Bill specifically exempt Mice, Rats and Birds
 - Mice, Rats and Birds are being written into the definition of animal

Public Perception: Who Looks out for the animals?

- Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)
- Federal Anti Cruelty Laws
- State and Municipal Cruelty Laws
- Animal rights groups
 - PETA
 - UPC
 - HSUS

Protests

- Protests
 - McDonalds
 - Kentucky Fried Chicken
 - Safeway
- Assaults
 - Throwing paint on Fur Coats
- Vandalism

Animal Rights Position Statements

- Millions of human beings are being killed by hunger and malnutrition because food they could eat is being used to fatten domestic animals
- Man tortures and kills millions of animals to look for cures to degenerative and fatal conditions like heart and kidney disease, and cancer
- The battle for Animal Rights equates with civil and human rights confrontations this country faced during the 1960's

Animal Agriculture Position

- Animal agriculture believed the animal rights movement would die out, and not affect them
- Congress will not pass any laws which would inhibit production agriculture
- The animal rights organizations are small fragmented groups and will not impact production agriculture

The Present



Who is Interested in Animal rights?

- Try a web search using the key words "Animal Rights"
 - 2,310,000 web sites listing this as a subject
- Harvard Law School
 - Animal Rights Law
 - Stephen Wise

Who is Interested in Animal Care?

- Try a web search using the key words "Animal Care"
 - 1,990,000 web sites listing this as a subject
- USDA Animal Care Home page

Who is Interested in Animal Welfare?

- Try a web search using the key words "Animal Welfare"
 - 743,000 web sites listing this as a subject

New Approach

- **Animal Rights Law (Harvard Law School)**
 - Animal Defense League
- **Lobbying Congress**
- **Proposing state statutes to prohibit agricultural practices**
- **Providing information to Educators**
- **Addressing Consumers through misinformation**

Tactics

- **PETA**
 - Educational Packets to teachers
 - Eliminating Dissection in biology Classes
 - Vegetarian Starter kits
 - Protesting Fairs
 - Protesting Circus
 - Children's Web Site

Terrorism (ALF)

- **1 act /week resulting in \$47,400 damages**
- **Arson**
 - Burning down egg processing facilities
 - Burning Cars
 - Research Facilities
- **Protesting "McMurder" and "Murder King"**
- **Breaking into facilities and freeing animals**

Terrorist Groups in North Carolina

- **Carolina Animal Activists Together**
 - Located in Raleigh
- **Direct Action for Animals and the Environment**
 - Located in Charlotte
- **Information for Terrorists**
 - The Tom Regan Animal Rights Archive
 - NCSU Library

The Future



New Guidelines

- **United Egg Producers Welfare Guidelines**
- **Animal Agriculture Alliance**
- **FMI-NCCR Animal Welfare Guidelines**
- **National Chicken Council**
- **National Turkey Federation**

New Guidelines

- **McDonalds Corporation**
- **Wendys**
- **Burger King**
- **FMI-NCCR Animal Welfare Program**
- **International**
 - **RSPCA**
 - **EEC Welfare Guidelines**

Attitudes

- **Production Agriculture needs to establish acceptable animal care guidelines**
- **Animal agriculture should improve consumer perception of the production process**
- **Animal care should exceed the regulations**
- **Our way is the only way!**

Changes in focus for Animal Welfare

- **Turkey Industry**
 - **Feed restriction programs (Toms)**
 - **Culling**
 - **Toe and beak trimming**
 - **Density**
- **Broilers**
 - **Restriction feeding programs (breeders)**
 - **Dubbing (Breeders)**
 - **Density**

Changes in focus for Animal Welfare

- **Organic Producers**
 - **Access to outdoors**
 - **Health care**
- **Transport**
 - **Loading equipment**
 - **Transport trucks**
- **Hatchery**
 - **Cull chick or poult disposal**
 - **Disposal of pips, and live embryos**
- **GMO's**