Facts About Livestock Production and Animal Welfare

Healthy animals mean healthy food for consumers. Livestock farmers and ranchers understand this, which is why they take all possible steps to ensure that animals are well cared for seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. Recently, there has been significant interest from activist groups and various segments of the food chain in the practices used by livestock farmers.

Illinois Farm Bureau Policy

The Illinois Farm Bureau (“IFB”) supports “care of livestock through acceptable management practices which will provide for better health and safety for the livestock while maintaining acceptable production levels.” IFB supports “the Illinois Department of Agriculture being the entity which shall administer the laws and regulations regarding the care of livestock and companion animals.”

Livestock Farmers

Farmers and ranchers care deeply about the health, well-being and safety of their animals, and ensure their animals’ well-being through proper management and shelter. Farmers recognize that superior animal care leads to the production of high-quality, safe and wholesome meat, milk and eggs and are constantly seeking ways to improve the well-being and comfort of animals. Beef, pork, dairy, and chicken producer organizations have all developed quality assurance programs that provide farmers and ranchers guidelines for the production of safe, wholesome animals, including recommendations on animal handling and facilities.

Animal Care

The Animal Agriculture Alliance seeks to “promote animal wellbeing and produce animal food products of the highest quality.” They have created the following set of six basic principles as a foundation for responsible animal care. “Provide access to good quality water and nutritionally balanced diets as appropriate for the species. Implement science-based animal health programs, including prudent product use, and provide appropriate veterinary care when required. Provide living conditions sufficient to meet the wellbeing needs of the animal as appropriate to each species. Implement science-based husbandry practices appropriate to the species. Ensure proper handling practices throughout the life of the animal as appropriate to each species. Provide transportation that avoids undue stress as appropriate to each species.”
Welfare Standards and Regulations

The banning of gestation stalls in pork production creates no real benefits for the welfare of the animals. The British Pork industry has seen a 50% reduction in the number of hogs produced during the last decade. This reduction has been attributed to increased regulations regarding animal welfare and a gestation stall ban imposed by the government.

The National Veterinary Institute of Sweden studied the mortality of chickens housed in cage-free and cage production systems. The research found significantly higher incidences of bacterial and parasitic diseases, higher incidence of viral diseases, and higher incidences of cannibalism in cage-free systems. Research has shown that banning egg production in sanitary cage systems would increase the carbon footprint of egg production and require an additional 580,000 acres of cropland in order to feed laying hens.

Unintended Consequences

Dr. Temple Grandin, a widely recognized animal welfare expert, states that it will take at least 10 years to properly transition away from gestation stalls in pork production. Doing so in a shorter timeframe would result in much worse conditions for the animals because they have not been bred for a group housing environment. Because of bans on the slaughter of horses that were passed or upheld in Illinois and Texas, all horse harvesting facilities in the United States have closed. Since the closing of these plants, at least 100,000 horses have been rescued or reported as mistreated because of a lack of options for their owners.

The various segments of the food chain must work together to address these issues. By considering expert analysis, data, economic feasibility and the input of farmers, veterinarians, and animal scientists, the best care and treatment of livestock can be assured.

References

2 Ibid.
4 Ibid.