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GLOBAL POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE INTERNSHIP POLICY BRIEF ANIMAL HOUSING LEGISLATION

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INTRODUCTION

Legislation relating to animal housing has been a recent topic of interest in the policy arena. Relatively speaking, it is considered a novel issue; however, this legislation has existed for several years. It is only recently that public outcry has turned the attention of policymakers to confined animal housing. Legislation relating to the confinement of farm animals dates back to the late 1900s. In recent years, the drafting and passage of this legislation has increased dramatically, starting with ballot initiatives in individual states and expanding to legislation at the federal level. Those specifically involved in agriculture and livestock production understand the implications of this legislation. The issue becomes important on the consumer level as well when we consider the massive amount of meat and other animal byproducts the world populace consumes each year. Most of the population is connected in some way with animals. Whether it is a beloved pet or a livestock animal destined for the dinner table, animals are at the core of our lives. Because this issue affects nearly all people, it is considered a significant policy issue and an important topic of discussion among policymakers and individuals alike.

THE ISSUE

Animal housing legislation aims to set standards for the confinement of farm animals. Modern production facilities often house animals in sow gestation stalls, veal crates, or in egg-laying hen cages. This system serves as individualized housing for the animals. Livestock experts affirm the benefits of individualized housing for the health of the animals. Individualized housing offers several factors that contribute to the well-being of the livestock. This housing system decreases competition for resources and aggression within a livestock group. Opponents argue, however, that there is not adequate space allotted for the animals housed in these systems. An aspect that often comes into play in this discussion is emotions and beliefs of the people involved. A recent movement toward winning animals' legal rights has changed the face of policymaking in this area. The issue has morphed into a humanitarian issue, rather than an issue on the practicality of livestock rearing. Several organizations have begun targeting the animal agriculture community to change their methods of production. At the pressure of these organizations, some companies have changed how they outsource their products, thereby decreasing potential output.

WHY IT MATTERS

This legislation poses a problem for livestock producers, who are responsible for raising livestock to provide meat and other animal byproducts to the world's population of seven billion people. Leaders in the industry have voiced estimates of the human population increasing

exponentially by 2050. This would require additional outputs in food production. In addition to high production demands, producers must raise these animals in the most efficient way possible to meet the food requirements of a growing population. Producers have voiced concern that legislation dictating the standards for confinement of livestock will make it nearly impossible to meet these production demands. Other players will be affected as well. The corporate sector can expect to be affected by requiring more monetary input, followed by less profitable outcomes. Consumers can expect to be affected on the individual level in the form of higher food prices and lower food availability.

As the discussion relating to this issue continues to heat up, we can expect more policy decisions to be made in the area of farm animal confinement. Similar legislative measures from the past will enable leaders in the industry to estimate what this policy may look like in the future.

CURRENT POLICY ENVIRONMENT

As mentioned previously, animal housing legislation has been in the policy discussion since the late 1900s. Organizations and individuals with an interest in the confinement of farm animals began policy discussions about companion animals and then broadened their scope to include farm animals. They targeted individual states with ballot initiatives, and then they moved into lobbying for legislation at the federal level. One of the first enacted legislative measures banned the use of gestation crates in pig production in the state of Florida. Adversaries of the use of gestation crates consider this their first victory. Supporters of confined animal housing as a production method consider this action to be the reason there are currently no pig production facilities in the state of Florida. Legislative measures continued to be enacted until the following states joined the ranks of states with animal confinement standards: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Maine, Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, and Washington.

An important ballot initiative to consider when discussing animal confinement housing is California's Proposition 2 of 2008. Proposition 2 created a new state statute that prohibits the confinement of farm animals in a manner that does not allow them to turn around freely, lie down, stand up, and fully extend their limbs. Previous legislation had eliminated calf and pig crates, but Proposition 2 in California was the first time the practice of confining chickens in cages was prohibited. It is this legislative measure that would lay a foundation for later legislation at the federal level.

Several attempts at enacting legislative measures at the federal level have been proposed. These have often centered on companion or research animal practices. One example is the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), which governs the humane care, handling, treatment, and transport of animals in certain situations. Other measures were drafted, but they never made it through the entire legislative process. The most recent and most controversial legislation to date is the Egg Products Inspection Act Amendments of 2012. This bill provided for a uniform national standard for the housing and treatment of egg-laying hens. It was added as an amendment onto the 2012 Agricultural Appropriations Bill (the 2012 farm bill), but was not brought up during floor discussion of the Senate version of the farm bill. The reason this bill was particularly controversial was due to an abnormal union between members of the opposing sides of confined animal housing. Leaders in the egg production industry supported the Egg Products Inspection Act, which was proposed and supported by the Humane Society of the United States. Often of differing viewpoints, these two entities formed a temporary alliance in an effort to capitalize on the benefits of this measure. Other leaders in the livestock industry found this

alliance disheartening. They believed it would set a precedent for future federal legislation dictating livestock housing standards. The current climate surrounding this issue is one of discontent. Neither side of the issue was able to make any gains, though both made concessions. In addition, it created a considerable division amongst the members of the animal agriculture industry. Members of the animal rights community disagreed on the unlikely alliance as well. This left those involved unsure of the next policy decisions to be made.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY

The science behind this issue is rooted in the advancements required to meet growing production efficiency demands. Livestock production efficiency has greatly increased with the use of confined animal housing—the need to optimize the ratio of resources used; food output is at the root of this issue. Producers who use these types of housing systems can generally produce more food output with less resource input needed. Another aspect to consider is the use of ionophores, implants, and feed additives. Ionophores are used as antibiotics or growth-enhancing feed additives in cattle. Ionophores change the population of the rumen to improve efficiency in ruminant animals such as cattle and sheep. Implants metabolically enhance nutrient use to enhance growth. Feed additives also enhance growth, thereby increasing production efficiency. These three technologies are augmenting food production outputs.

SOCIAL

The social aspect behind this issue is rooted in the emotions and beliefs of the people involved in the discussion. Animal welfare is defined differently by different people, causing this to be a difficult topic to address. Opponents of confined housing systems believe this type of housing causes unnecessary discomfort, thereby categorizing it as inhumane. Consumers are often led to believe that the health and well-being of livestock are not well monitored. On the contrary, livestock producers attempt to raise their animals in a manner that enhances their health and well-being to keep them producing appropriately. The people who interact with these animals everyday know their needs and meet these needs; it would not be beneficial for anyone if the animals were unhealthy. In addition to an emotional basis for proper care for animals, there is also a scientific basis. It has been shown that stress prior to slaughter lowers meat quality and quantity. This decreases the profit margin for producers, so improper care of livestock would be economically diffident. In addition, the social implications behind the use of production enhancers are a controversial social aspect related to this topic. Consumers often question the safety of these technologies. The animal sciences industry attempts to address these fears with science-based, factual information.

ECONOMIC

As previously mentioned, the consequences of this legislation affect both the corporate and private sectors. In the corporate sector, businesses and producers may undergo dramatic changes in input costs required for the same unit of output. In the private sector, individuals may see increased food costs and decreased food availability. For example, the University of California Agricultural Issues Center (AIC) issued a July 2008 study about the fiscal impact of Proposition 2 in California. The study affirmed some major points. The first major point stated that non-cage systems incur costs of production that are at least 20 percent higher than the common cage housing systems due to higher feed costs, higher hen laying mortality, higher direct housing costs, and higher labor costs. Secondly, the cost to consumers purchasing eggs

was expected to increase by at least 25 percent. This could further lead to increased poverty and poorer nutrition as food becomes less available to those in the lower-income bracket.

POLICY ANALYSIS AND ALTERNATIVES

If we look to the United States' neighboring countries, we can see various approaches to the question about the policy alternatives to confined animal housing. Some of these solutions may not be feasible for the United States; however, they are worth exploring further. For example, the use of battery cages for egg-laying hens is now illegal in the European Union. This means that no egg-laying hens can be housed in previously defined, standard-sized cages. What this means for the EU, however, is that more resources will be needed to maintain current egg production levels. Luckily for the world's egg-eaters, the EU is not the highest egg producer in the world. If it were, we would soon expect to experience a decrease in the availability of eggs to consumers. As mentioned previously, researchers from the University of California have demonstrated that non-cage systems had higher hen mortality rates. If more hens die in these production systems, a different solution must be reached. The Egg Products Inspection Act aimed to standardize the egg industry in the United States by enforcing the use of enrichment cages. If enacted, this legislation would have made it obligatory to have cages bigger than the previously accepted size. Though it wasn't enacted, this approach appears to be a valid solution between industry and animal advocates, and it will likely be revisited again in years to come.

When we look at the issue with the use of gestation stalls, the EU and Canada have answered the call from animal rights advocates to ban their use. Most pork producers in Europe and Canada have transitioned into group housing of their animals. What most consumers don't realize is that the individualized housing of gestation stalls eliminates problems that arise between aggressive sows. Understanding sow behavior is the key in minimizing problems associated with aggressive encounters between sows (Ontario Pork). Because of the natural behavior of sows to compete for limited food resources, group housing may be more detrimental than beneficial. It is important to consider the health of the animal when looking at these policy alternatives. Sometimes what is best for the animals' health may not align with what the public thinks is the best health option.

Looking at the United States, most states that have banned the use of gestation stalls have lost their pork producers. Because of the inability to meet the demands of production without the use of gestation housing systems, pork producers have either moved their operations to other states or stopped production entirely. These ballot initiatives have made it unachievable for pork producers to continue industrialized production. In addition, public demand has caused major companies such as McDonald's and Wal-Mart to only purchase stall-free pork. This has shifted production standards dramatically. This policy issue is unique in that public demand, rather than an actual measure of legislation, is shifting production. There is still much debate into what policy alternative is the best solution to this issue.

CONCLUSION

The best solution to this issue may lie in the production practices surrounding housing systems, rather than housing systems themselves. Utilizing traditional disciplines such as genetics, physiology, nutrition, and ethology to develop better husbandry systems may provide solutions to the housing systems debate. For example, genetic selection practices can be a useful tool in improving farm animal welfare. Selecting for productivity and survivability may change how experts look at housing systems.

WORK CITED

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