

October 21, 2009

Dear \* Legislator \*

Recent media attention in South Dakota on animal raids and efforts by the Humane Society of the United States has been very one-sided. We believe that much of this is being pushed by radical groups that are trying to promote their agenda to eliminate livestock production and increase their profit by exploiting unfortunate incidents of animal abuse.

South Dakota's agriculture industry asks you as a state legislator to consider the facts and the ramifications of pursuing an expanded animal rights agenda in South Dakota. If anything, the current activity points out areas of current law that could be strengthened so that an overzealous "rescue" worker doesn't exploit current statutes to steal animals or birds from their owners.

Some key points:

- The state's agriculture groups in no way condone the mistreatment of animals. No one has greater interest in the proper care and treatment of animals than the state's farmers and ranchers. The beef, pork, dairy, lamb, and poultry industries have all developed guidelines for the proper care, handling, and treatment of livestock.
- South Dakota currently has in place a set of sound, workable statutes addressing the issue of animal cruelty (Chapters 40-1 and 40-2).
- Animal husbandry practices are proven management techniques that contribute to overall herd or flock health and food safety. However, to an individual who is uninformed or misinformed, some of these practices may appear to be acts of mistreatment.
- Anti-livestock groups have a very negative view of modern livestock production; they often refer to modern livestock barns as "factories." An agenda based on such views puts into question every level of agricultural production in the state, including 4-H and FFA projects.
- To say that South Dakota is one of only three states without a felony penalty for animal cruelty is a misrepresentation. We are among 18 states that classify animal fighting as a felony offense.
- As we researched other states' laws, we found a consistent theme of specifically exempting agricultural pursuits and hunting from animal cruelty statutes.

The animal rights agenda being promoted by out-of-state interests would cripple the state's economy and lifestyle. It is an offense to farm and ranch families in every county in our state who devote their time, energy, and life to taking proper care of their animals and poultry. We sincerely hope that the people who are asking you to make significant changes to our animal care statutes are not - and have not - been affiliated with the national organizations that want to put a stop to all livestock production in the United States.

On behalf of the state's farmers and ranchers, we ask you to resist unfounded efforts by the Humane Society of the United States, "Bark the Vote" and PETA. We ask that if you are contacted by the newly-formed South Dakota Coalition for Companion Animals you ask them to provide clear and convincing evidence that our laws are not adequate and should require criminal penalties.

Sincerely,

Ag United for South Dakota, Sioux Falls  
SD Association of Cooperatives, Pierre  
SD Cattlemen's Association, Pierre  
SD Corn Growers Association, Sioux Falls  
SD Dairy Producers, Brookings  
SD Farm Bureau, Huron  
SD Farmers Union, Huron  
SD Soybean Association, Sioux Falls  
SD Stockgrowers Association, Rapid City  
SD Pork Producers Council, Sioux Falls  
SD Poultry Industries Association, Brookings

**Economic impact of South Dakota's animal industry:**

Agriculture and livestock production are driving forces in South Dakota's economy, with a total economic impact of \$21.3 billion and employing more than 173,000 people.

The livestock industry alone accounts for \$5.7 billion in economic activity.

The hunting and fishing industries add another \$366 million to the state's economy.