Prevent Cruelty to Farm Animals

This bill lays out standards for the ethical treatment of farm animals. H.1456 would impose a penalty for 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.

■ The Bill
H.1456: An Act to prevent farm animal cruelty

■ Letter to the Legislator

Mohandas Gandhi once said that the greatness of a nation and its moral process can be judged by the way its animals are treated. If this is the case, the United States is in a sad state of affairs. Gestation crates and battery cages are common practices amongst industrial meat producers. These immensely crowded living spaces have been compared to a human living out their days in a coffin, never getting the chance to move or turn around.

Massachusetts has always been a leader in animal welfare. In fact, the MSPCA has voted the state the second best in terms of animal treatment. However, we are beginning to fall behind. Seven states have already outlawed these affronts to animal well-being, getting positive results.

There has been a clear call for these measures from consumers, as naturally raised and cage-free produce sales have climbed significantly in recent years. Aside from the moral aspect, many consumers believe that it is healthier to consume humanely raised meat. Packed conditions are known to spread disease amongst animals, which increases the need for antibiotics. Some studies have even shown that the stress of these living conditions changes the protein quality in meat.

Our state doesn’t have many farms that use these cruel practices. There is only one that utilizes battery cages, and none are known to use gestation crates. By guaranteeing that these practices don’t occur in the Commonwealth, not only can we help local animals, we help set a moral standard for the rest of the nation to live up to.

The main arguments against this bill are financial, reason being that more space for animals means fewer and therefore less profit, driving prices up. However, this concern can be dismissed for several reasons. Firstly, there
are few enough farms utilizing these practices in MA that a price increase would be minimal at best. By some estimates, prices would only increase by a few cents if we implemented these measures nationally. Furthermore, in states where similar legislation has been implemented costs have actually been driven down as competition increased. Small family farms that didn’t think they could make it versus the giants of industrial agriculture suddenly were able to compete.

As you can see, this bill would be very little cost for making our state a leader in animal rights, our consumers healthier, and Massachusetts a better place to live overall. Please voice your support for bill H.1456.

Op-Ed

As humans, we are lucky enough to be at the top of the food chain. But, it seems like we abuse it. Humans and animals alike experience life through their bodies, and some manifestation of a soul. Humans are more advanced in countless ways than animals, but they feel many of the same feelings as us. They can feel joy and connection, as well as anger, grief, pain and fear. The way we as humans contribute to and increase the power of these difficult experiences is simply unacceptable.

Do you stomp on an ant just for the fun of it, because your feet are big enough? Do you throw cats off you lap when they want to be pet because your arms are strong enough to do so? No, and no. So why do we utilize industry, business, agriculture, and politics as tools to allow inhumane treatment of farm animals? Some say it does not matter how we treat farm animals, because “we’re gonna eat them anyway.” Well, I will present you with another question: how does the fact that we are going to eat them imply it is acceptable to torture them? Perhaps keeping them in cages overnight is reasonable, but cages they cannot turn around in, or even sit down in, are simply inhumane. This situation is common across the country, and there are even a few examples still in Massachusetts.

Massachusetts has been a leader in humane farming practices, but there are still instances of animal abuse in the state. One farm in Western Massachusetts uses a system called battery cages, which is a large cage that is stuffed full with chickens. This is beyond uncomfortable; it is unhealthy, for the animals, and possibly for human consumers as well. Studies are underway, but do we really need the studies to convince us not to abuse animals?

We should not need them. The saddest part is that animals do not need to ever be treated this way. Again: there is no need for this treatment. The cost is estimated to be a few hundred dollars to a small farm at most. If a farm needs to alter their cages for chickens, and nothing for pigs or cows or other animals, or make other changes infrastructure, this cost could be much lower. If the battery cage, one huge cage, were adjusted to have separate, reasonably sized individual cages for the chickens, the cost would be even lower. Money should not be the main focus here – morals should.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Molly

The first meeting that I had was with a legislative aide for Representative Jason Lewis, who proposed our bill, an act to prevent farm animal cruelty. Leah and I were together for this meeting, and it went very well. Laura, the aide, called the bill her “baby”. She had done a lot of work on the bill and was very well informed. Another thing that I really liked about this meeting was that her passion stemmed from beliefs that were very moderate. She wasn’t the stereotype of a crazed left-wing vegan nut. She was just a woman working in the office who understood the true implications of the bill and what it would mean in Mass. Getting that moderate view with a lot of information backing it was a solid start for moving forward.

The only drawback to the visit was that our time was short. However, we learned a little about what the current status of the bill was. She told us that it was in the Judiciary Committee, but being held up moving forward because another bill had been proposed that would create an animal welfare board for the state, which would make ours rather unnecessary. The creators of the board were in private talks, going back and forth about how many people should be on the board and what their roles should be. We couldn’t be involved in those talks, but continuing to fight for our piece of legislation would bring attention to legislators the fact that people in Massachusetts care animal treatment, and this extends not just to pets, but farm animals as well.

Leah

One of the times I went to the State House, Molly and I wanted to interview certain staff or legislators for our video. . . . We learned a lot about the motions of everyday life in the fast-paced environment that is the State House. I had wanted to visit the Department of Agriculture in particular, which is where we received information about our bill, and the opposition, or perceived opposition.

We learned that our bill was up for another vote, which confirmed what we had heard from the bill writer’s aide:
there might be contention, but we still should push for this bill. There was some confusion at the State House and Department of Agriculture about these bills and their place, which I think is for a few reasons: the communication is fast, but movement and meetings in the State House are faster; and, animal rights are generally not central issues to most legislators, let alone farm animal rights.

Therefore, I learned that sometimes, as an advocate, you might face a lot of confusion about your cause, or lack of knowledge, but that does not mean not to push for meetings, educate others, or give up. It means that there is an area that is not necessarily at the front of most legislators’ minds, so, there is a different kind of work in explaining the bill in an objective, not just subjective, way. Additionally, I learned that sometimes you have to sit and wait, and you may not receive the reception you wanted. That is not the time to get upset, but to move forward; if anything, use the frustration or disappointment to remember the importance of what you are advocating for, and that it takes, (in part), patient and passionate people to make change happen.

**Update**

As of September 12, 2014, H.1456 had been added to S.2232, which is in the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

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**For more information**

Massachusetts Humane Society
www.masshumane.org