

Animals Win at Ballot Box

By Mat Thomas



PROPOSITION 204, DUBBED “THE HUMANE Treatment of Farm Animals Act,” passed on Election Day with a resounding 62 percent of the vote, making Arizona the first US state to ban veal crates and the second (after Florida) to outlaw gestation crates for pregnant sows. Along with battery cages for egg-laying hens, these intensive restraining devices are designed to confine animals to the smallest possible amount of space in the interest of maximizing profit. That these contraptions will no longer be allowed in Arizona is a major victory for the animal-advocacy movement and those it represents.

This groundbreaking law is likely to affect far more than the 13,500 pregnant sows housed on any given day at Pigs for Farmer John, a Hormel subsidiary that is Arizona’s only industrial pork facility. (There are no commercial veal operations in the state.) With nearly two years to go before the next election, advocates are already considering other states where similar ballot initiatives might succeed. They also hope that Prop. 204 may pave the way for federal legislation to improve the treatment of animals throughout the United States.

“The victory in Arizona shows most people agree that veal and gestation crates are cruel, and that existing laws are out of line with broader societal values,” says Gene Bauston, co-founder and president of Farm Sanctuary (which, along with The Humane Society of the United States, Arizona Humane Society and the Animal Defense League of Arizona, comprised Arizonans for Humane Farms, the coalition that led the effort to pass Prop. 204).

“Whereas the usual legislative process allows the agriculture industry to quietly kill animal welfare bills in committee, an initiative puts animal welfare issues right out there for people to think about and allows them to vote their values.”

The likelihood of similar ballot measures cropping up in other states is one of the very few things that both animal advocacy organizations and agribusiness experts agree on, as is evident in the spate of post-election editorials penned by hand-wringing industry insiders. As one example, here’s Troy Marshall writing in *Cow-Calf Weekly*, the e-newsletter of *BEEF* (“America’s leading cattle publication”): “The animal rights movement has found a model for success...We can expect these initiatives to emerge at a more rapid pace, and agriculture is going to have to figure out how to band together to counteract the massive funding disadvantage that agriculture is going to have.”

Talk of a “massive funding disadvantage” sounds strange coming from a mouthpiece for the beef industry, which claimed \$49.6 billion in US cash receipts last year—yet it points to an interesting shift: it reveals agribusiness’ recognition that the public really does want farmed animals to be treated decently. Whether the industry will improve their husbandry practices in response or continue to hide the systematic abuse taking place on factory farms remains to be seen. **VN**

Mat Thomas pens *NewsBeet* in every edition of *VegNews*. Read more of his writing at animalrighter.org.

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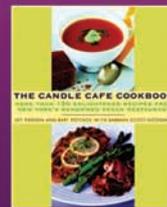
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