

VN columnist **Mat Thomas** brings the latest headlines to you.



Phasing Out Factory Farms

Do we need a national moratorium on the construction and expansion of factory farms?

WHILE MILLIONS OF HUMAN BEINGS, MOSTLY children, starve to death every year around the world, “livestock” are fattened on grains so that privileged people can eat their butchered bodies. *Every bite of meat takes food away from a malnourished baby.*

Even though global warming endangers our very existence and the animal-agriculture industry produces more greenhouse gasses than all the cars, trucks, trains, and planes in the world, most people don’t think twice about lurching on hamburgers and hot dogs. The 575 billion pounds of animal waste produced on US factory farms every year pump bacterial pathogens, heavy metals, and toxic chemicals into the air and water, destroying natural habitats and making people sick. *Every bite of meat brings us a little closer to eating ourselves into extinction.*

Approximately 10 billion land animals are slaughtered for meat every year in the US—about three times the number killed for food only 40 years ago. In that time, most farms have been turned into flesh factories that raise one species of animal by the thousands, keeping them confined indoors, sometimes in cages or stalls, for most of their lives. *Every*

bite of meat condemns an innocent prisoner to torture and death.

Is it just me, or is factory farming utterly immoral and insane? Given the industry’s litany of evil deeds, it’s rather amazing that it hasn’t already been outlawed. It feels strange even having to state such an obvious fact, but it’s *way* past time that we put an end to factory farming.

We need a serious, long-range plan to do this, but a logical and relatively modest first step would be to stop more factory farms from being built and prohibit the expansion of existing facilities. That is, we need a *moratorium* on Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) in the short term as a necessary first step towards the ultimate abolition of factory farming in the future.

Senator John Edwards called for a national moratorium on CAFOs when he was still seeking the Democratic Party’s nomination for President of the United States, particularly during early primaries in Midwestern states with largely agricultural economies. Edwards’ clarion call addresses the needs of small family-farmers whose traditional way of life is being wiped out by giant agribusiness corporations, and residents

whose health and quality of life are negatively impacted merely by living in proximity to factory farms. His message also made factory farming a real policy issue in the presidential race for the first time in American history while also emboldening a pre-existing grassroots movement that has focused on passing local and regional moratoria.

For years now, environmentalists, public-health advocates, and small-scale farmers have been forming coalitions to enact various forms of factory-farming moratoria. They have been instrumental in convincing some states (most notably Nebraska and North Carolina) to pass at least partial building bans. At present, there are bills in Ohio and Michigan that could lead to the implementation of laws in those states halting CAFO construction.

The Sierra Club runs what is, perhaps, the country’s strongest campaign against CAFOs, with a national moratorium as one of its goals. As early as 2003, the American Public Health Association—the world’s largest public-health organization—issued a resolution advocating a national moratorium on all new factory farms on the grounds that they make their workers and neighbors sick. Earlier this year,



the Iowa Farmers Union presented more than 5,000 petition signatures to state legislators demanding a temporary halt on construction of new CAFOs to save small farms and preserve rural values.

What seems to be missing from these efforts is the fully engaged participation of animal advocates. While some individual activists are working on this issue, not a single national animal-protection organization has mounted a substantial campaign seeking a moratorium. This seems like a grave oversight given the egregious animal abuses occurring on factory farms, and the amount of good a national moratorium would accomplish for our cause.

For different but interrelated reasons, animal advocates, environmentalists, public health proponents, and small farmers all want to hold factory farms accountable for their actions. However, each of these groups alone cannot win a moratorium: We *must* work with each other to raise the public's awareness of factory farming's destructiveness, and win people's support for a moratorium not only in their communities, but at the national level as well. Because factory farming affects everyone, we can achieve a moratorium by appealing to mainstream values.

Vegetarian advocates can play an essential role in this movement, because at the core of the factory-farming debate is the issue of meat consumption: **As long as people persist in purchasing large quantities of animal products, CAFOs will continue to justify their growth by claiming they are only trying to keep up with consumer demand.** As members of a diverse coalition, we vegetarians can use our unique insight to gently persuade our omnivorous colleagues that it is in their best interests to eat less meat, and that they must strongly encourage their constituents to do the same in order for the moratorium to succeed.

And everyone can promote a national moratorium by urging presidential candidates to make it part of their official platform. A perceptive politician will recognize that factory farming is central to such key election issues as health care, climate change, and energy conservation, so their position on a moratorium may give us a good idea of what kind of leader he or she will be. **VN**

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

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