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Agriculture Industry Must Learn From Disappointing Outcome in Ohio

July 1, 2010—Ohio has represented an important and symbolic battleground for the past year. [Last fall](#), Ohioans overwhelmingly supported the creation of the Livestock Care Standards Board, a proactive effort meant to ensure the proper care of animals on the state's many farms.

Unfortunately, Ohio's agricultural leadership has succumbed to pressures from the Humane Society of the United States, a national animal rights group that has effectively undermined the authority of the newly-established board by imposing restrictions that mandate the way that producers can care for their animals.

HSUS agreed to withdraw its pending initiative from the ballot this fall if the producer organizations agreed to meet certain important stipulations- including the phasing out of scientifically-based housing systems that will affect many producers in the state. A moratorium will be placed on the installation of new conventional cage systems used for laying hens and gestation stalls for pregnant sows. In HSUS' [most far-reaching deal yet](#), the demands also included the Governor's agreement to encourage increased penalties for cockfighting, "puppy mills," and humane euthanasia to the state legislature.

To be clear- the only group to benefit from this agreement is HSUS. Agriculture is the top industry in Ohio, contributing \$79 billion to the state's economy each year. HSUS is an activist organization that thrives on conflict- it does not contribute to the economy or tax base of Ohio. HSUS' campaign has served only to fundraise and gain momentum for its vegan agenda.

Undoubtedly, the battle over the threatened ballot initiative would have been expensive and unpleasant- but it would have also sent a strong message to HSUS that the agriculture community is united and committed to protecting the rights of farmers and ranchers to produce a plentiful, affordable, and nutritious food supply while using [science-based standards](#) to ensure animal well-being.

Instead, consumers in Ohio will soon either be subjected to increased prices for locally-raised animal protein products or will rely on conventionally-produced foods imported from nearby states or elsewhere. Ohio's small and mid-sized family farms will be the ones most hurt by this agreement if they do not have the capital to invest in the conversion to alternative production systems.

This “compromise” is only the beginning. HSUS CEO Wayne Pacelle has indicated that the agreement is “not legally binding,” meaning that while HSUS will not be pursuing a ballot initiative this fall, the future is still uncertain.

Farmers and ranchers should consider this a final wake-up call. HSUS will not rest until the entire animal agriculture industry in the United States is eradicated. The group’s leaders have indicated time and time again *[insert link to quotes from HSUS leaders]* of their true agenda- to systematically introduce legislation state-by-state that will drive producers out of business and make meat, milk, and eggs too expensive for the average American to enjoy.

No one understands animal care better than farmers and ranchers- which is why the majority of producers follow nationally-recognized animal welfare guidelines. The agriculture industry has evolved over the past 100 years to improve animal welfare and meet increased food demand. Reverting to 1950s style practices would not be beneficial to the animals nor the consumer.

HSUS is an extremist animal rights group that does not deserve a seat at the discussion table on issues of farm animal welfare. It is unfortunate that the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board will not be given the opportunity to fulfill its responsibility- to ensure livestock care and promote safe and local food production.

The Animal Agriculture Alliance, a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization, is a broad-based coalition of individual farmers, ranchers, producer organizations, suppliers, packer-processors, private industry scientists, veterinarians, and retailers. The Alliance’s mission is to communicate the important role of animal agriculture to our nation’s economy, productivity, vitality, and security and that animal well-being is central to producing safe, high-quality, affordable food and other products essential to our daily lives.

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