



Michigan Amends State Animal Industry Act

New regulations give space to tethered and confined farm animals.

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Michigan HB5127 amends the state's Animal Industry act to give covered animals, such as those in gestation stalls and battery cages, ample space. The governor of Michigan recently signed a bill that will modify the state's Animal Industry Act. The amendment, HB 5127 sponsored by Rep. Mike Simpson (D-Jackson), ensures any covered animal—that is, any gestating cow, calf raised for veal or egg-laying hen—the proper amount of space when tethered or confined.

“The language is performance oriented on what the animal ought to be able to do,” says Janice Swanson, director of Animal Welfare at Michigan State University’s Department of Animal Science. The bill states an animal must be able to lay down, stand up, fully extend its limbs and turn around freely.

The bill will not apply, however, to certain groups of farm animals. Those include covered animals used for research or veterinary purposes; being transported; shown at rodeos, fairs or similar exhibitions; being sent to slaughter under government regulations; or within seven days of a gestating sow’s expected date of giving birth.

Representatives from a number of farming organizations, including Michigan Allied Poultry Industries and Michigan Pork Producers Association, sat in on discussions of the bill’s content, with Jim Byrum of the Michigan Agro Business Association serving as mediator. As a result, there seems to be few qualms about what the bill means for the Michigan farming industry, Swanson says.

“It will take some time to see how it plays out,” she says. “If you are not someone using the production equipment affected by the language of the bill, then you don’t have to worry about it.”

Farmers using gestation crates or stalls for sows or battery cages for hens will have 10 years from the bill's enactment to comply with the regulations, and those using veal crates will have until Oct. 1, 2012. Swanson says it will be up to public scientists, such as her department at the MSU extension office, to look into what needs to be done to make these transitions happen.

According to Simpson, chair of the House Agriculture Committee and the bill’s sponsor, these standards set an example for a national model.

“This plan strikes a reasonable balance between protecting the hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars generated by the Michigan agricultural industry and safeguarding the health and safety of millions of animals raised on Michigan farms,” he says.