



Ohio Keeps Livestock Care Standards Local

Passage of Ohio's Issue 2 establishes a board to regulate livestock care.

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The passage of Ohio Issue 2 in November 2009 allowed Ohio to establish a local board to regulate livestock care. Members of Ohio's agriculture industry are working to appoint members of the newly established Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board, a direct result of the passage of Issue 2 in the November 2009 elections.

Initiated by the Ohio Farm Bureau to support Ohio farmers of all sizes, the local regulating body will develop standards for livestock care in Ohio. The board will comprise 13 livestock experts from Ohio, including farmers, veterinarians, food safety experts, a local humane society representative, academics and consumers.

Farming is Ohio's top economic contributor, said Jim Chakeres, executive vice president of the Ohio Poultry Association and member of the steering committee that promoted Issue 2. The desire for a local board that focuses on the state's unique agriculture needs was the driving force behind the campaign.

"Ohio's agriculture community recognized that the board was the right approach to ensure farmers can continue doing what we do best—caring for our animals and providing safe food for the world," Chakeres said.

An ongoing conversation between Ohio farmers and consumers also stimulated the issue. While the board will focus on humane livestock care, it also impacts the production of safe, affordable, locally grown food for Ohio consumers, Chakeres said. He noted that out-of-state initiatives that threatened the campaign would hurt Ohio agriculture: "Implementing [such initiatives] would drive agriculture out of Ohio, force state farms to shut down, and increase both food prices and Ohio's reliance on other states and countries for food products," he said.

National activist groups, like the Humane Society of the United States, opposed Issue 2, viewing it as a roadblock to reforms encouraging the humane treatment of livestock. In a statement released before elections, HSUS said it would launch an initiative in Ohio to ensure ample room for farm animals kept in veal crates, gestation crates and battery cages.

Other national organizations, like American Humane, which promotes humane animal care, supported Ohio's effort to develop a local regulating body.

"Our experience working with agricultural interests has shown that the most effective reform of animal welfare standards come when the solutions are not only good for animals, but good for people who buy food and good for farmers too," said Marie Belew Wheatley, president and CEO of American Humane. "We think it's important when farms large and small are part of the solution and voluntarily make good animal husbandry a part of their operating procedures."

In the weeks and months following the passage of Issue 2, the soon-to-be-appointed chairman of the board will work with Ohio's agriculture director Robert Boggs, Governor Ted Strickland and the Ohio General Assembly to develop legislation that will determine the functions and processes of the board and will continue conversations with local consumers and Ohioans for Livestock Care.

"This continued unity will allow us to engage with the board as it begins to consider policies about farm animal care in Ohio," Chakeres said.