

Veal, pork, egg industries should advocate reforms

It was disheartening to see Korre Boyer's recent unwarranted attack on The Humane Society of the United States. Mr. Boyer is sadly ill-informed about the work of the organization, and it is necessary for us to correct the record.

The HSUS is the nation's largest animal welfare charity, with 11 million supporters, including more than 400,000 in Ohio alone. We operate the nation's largest network of animal sanctuaries and wildlife rehabilitation centers, as well as provide free veterinary care and other services for tens of thousands of animals each year.

Contrary to Mr. Boyer's caricature of the organization, we strongly encourage Americans to adopt dogs and cats, and in fact spend millions of dollars each year promoting the adoption of pets. We also celebrate the connection we share with them and the enrichment they bring to our lives.

When it comes to the treatment of animals within the agribusiness industry, The HSUS stands with the many farmers, veterinarians, and food safety experts who are working to improve the treatment of our nation's farm animals. Together, we know that higher animal welfare standards are also better for food safety and family farmers.

Unfortunately, some factory farm practices have simply grown out of step with mainstream American values about how we ought to treat animals. For example, in order to produce veal, most calves are taken from their mothers when they are just hours or days old and then chained by their necks in crates too narrow for them to turn around or even lie down comfortably. Virtually immobilized and prevented from engaging in many natural behaviors, they suffer immensely.

Similarly, during nearly their entire four-month pregnancies, millions of female pigs used for breeding are confined in barren gestation crates - individual metal cages only two feet wide. The crates are so small that the animals cannot even turn around. Barely able to move, these highly intelligent and social animals suffer terribly and develop crippling joint disorders and lameness.

And at the same time, hundreds of millions of egg-laying hens are confined in tiny, barren battery cages so small that the birds can't spread their wings, nest, dust bathe, perch, or even walk. Each caged hen has less space than a sheet of letter-sized paper on which to live for more than a year before she is slaughtered. It really is difficult to imagine a worse existence.

It's not just common sense that we should end this cruel and inhumane treatment of farm animals. An abundance of scientific evidence demonstrates that cramming farm animals into cages so small they can barely move is detrimental to their welfare and to food safety.

For example, the prestigious Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production - an independent panel chaired by former Kansas Governor John Carlin and including former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman - extensively studied the issue for two and a half years. At the end of their research, the commissioners unanimously concluded that we should phase out battery cages, gestation crates, and veal crates.

The Scientific Veterinary Committee of the European Union also concluded these three confinement systems must be ended, leading the EU to legislate against all three. Several states on this side of the Atlantic have similarly prohibited some or all of these cruelties, including Colorado, Arizona, California, Florida and Oregon.

It should therefore come as no surprise that major national retailers like Safeway and Burger King are increasingly phasing in crate-free and cage-free products. **The country's top veal and pork producers - such as Smithfield Foods and Strauss Veal - have begun to phase out crates and move toward group housing systems for pigs and calves.** And nearly all major egg producers now produce both cage and cage-free eggs.

All animals, including those raised for food, deserve to be treated humanely. Rather than defending cruel agribusiness practices that the majority of Ohioans - and Americans - consider indefensible, Ohio's veal, pork, and egg industries should be advocating for the kinds of common sense reforms we've seen several other states already adopt. Allowing animals the ability to turn around and extend their limbs is really a matter we should all be able to agree upon.