

OPINION

Egg Producers' Pact With HSUS Is A Bit Unsettling

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

Don't get me wrong, but I do think there are many animal welfare practices promoted by such organizations as the controversial Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) that are a good idea.

But I don't think any agricultural industry should force its producers to use these practices, and I don't think the government should ever get involved one bit in mandating these practices. I believe any changes to production practices should come from a grassroots effort — a consumer-led trend.

Anything else has potential to explode in the face of producers but across the board. Recently, it was announced that the United Egg Producers (UEP), a cooperative of egg-laying operations that represent 95 percent of the United States' egg industry, has entered into a formal contract with HSUS on promoting the enactment of federal legislation regulating the nation's egg production. If passed, this legislation-in-the-works would be the first federal law of any kind to regulate the treatment of farm animals.

Scary, to say the least. I think this would be particularly unnerving for commercial egg producers, but it even makes me shudder and I'm just a small farmer who sells eggs to friends, family, neighbors and others who pass by our simple wooden sign at the end of our driveway that reads "EGGS." My hens aren't in cages; in fact, they're free-ranging on our acreage as I write. But I, like most producers, like autonomy, and even if this legislation seems like a good thing, like getting hens out of small confinement cages in the biggest operations, it will filter down to the mom-and-pop backyard flocks in some way.

Not to mention that this opens the door to widespread regulation throughout animal agriculture.

And you thought the price of food was expensive now? Just wait until food production becomes so regulated that a producer can't blink without filling out paperwork or shelling out money to pass some government inspection. It's hard to justify most animal operations as profitable on their own now — well, at least to the point of actually supporting a family without outside income sources; it will be nearly impossible to do so once producer autonomy is sucked away by government regulation.

And don't think this will stop with animal agriculture. It will likely eventually filter down to non-animal food production, too.

I wonder if the UEP thought this all through before it signed on the dotted line with the HSUS. But before I get ahead of myself, let's take a look at this HSUS-UEP agreement. According to HSUS — apparently UEP is content with HSUS handling the media affairs, as there's nothing to be found that is generated by the UEP — the proposed legislation would require, among other things such as euthanasia requirements:

- Conventional cages to be replaced by "enriched" housing systems that would cost egg producers \$4 billion. These new housing systems would give all egg-laying hens enough space to allow perching, scratching, and sitting in nest boxes.
- Labeling on all egg cartons to inform consumers of the method used to produce eggs, such as "eggs from caged hens," "eggs from hens in enriched cages," "eggs from cage-free hens," and "eggs from free-range hens."

Gag, Gag, Gag. Again, don't get me wrong, I do think hens should have enough space to act like a chicken. And I do think consumers should be informed on their food choices.

But to mandate it — oh no! The first thing that pops up is that \$4 billion price tag to convert the cages. You know who's going to end up paying that, don't you? If a producer wants to invest that kind of money on his own, that's one thing; mandating changes that require producers, willing or not, to invest that kind of money, that's another thing.

The other thing that pops up is mandating labeling on all egg cartons. Consumers aren't dumb — they know that the majority of eggs sold through commercial outlets come from caged hens. There is market advantage to producers who do produce eggs from cage-free hens, and those producers are certainly smart enough to advertise their eggs as such. This industry-wide regulation doesn't help the consumer at all, and it certainly doesn't help the producer. The only thing it guarantees to do is to raise egg prices on all levels, because no mandate is possible without cash outlay from the producer — and this labeling requirement will hit every producer, from the largest to the very smallest.

Century Farms, Quasiquintennial Applications Being Accepted

Farms and ranches have long been the cornerstone of South Dakota history. None more perhaps than those we honor as South Dakota Century Farms. The families that own and work these farms and ranches have done so for one hundred years or longer.

If your family has retained ownership of a farm or ranch for 100 years or more in South Dakota, and if the farm consists of a minimum of 80 acres of the original farmland, you may be interested in having your farm designated as a Century Farm.

If your family has owned at least 80 acres of the same farm or ranch for at least 125 years, you are eligible to apply for Quasiquintennial Farm recognition.

The recognition ceremony is scheduled to start at 10 a.m. on Thursday, September 1, at the state fairgrounds in Huron.

Application forms are available online at the S.D. Farm Bureau website (www.sdfbf.org) or the South Dakota Department of Agriculture website (<http://sdda.sd.gov/Secretary/Century-Farms/default.aspx>), or by calling the SDFB office in Huron at 605-353-8052 to request an application.

Applications are due at the SDFB office by Aug. 12.

Century Farms have been recognized at the State Fair since 1984 by the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and S.D. Farm Bureau. Last year, in honor of the 125th anniversary of the State Fair, the two organizations began honoring Quasiquintennial farms as well.

The 2011 Fair will run Sept. 1-5. For more information on State Fair events, visit www.sdstatefair.com.

Women On The Farm

Program Promotes The Female Perspective In Agriculture

BY LINDA WUEBBEN
P&D Correspondent

ST. JAMES, Neb. — A pilot program, Women Caring For the Land, held at the St. James Marketplace in St. James, Neb., recently focused on women in agriculture. It was a free day-event sponsored by the Center For Rural Affairs. One of the main goals is to develop a worldwide network of women in agriculture who would share information and be willing to connect with other women land lovers, giving them workable solutions they can use in their own operations.

The program was funded by a grant from the USDA's North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program. The day session was also sponsored in partnership with Women, Food and Agriculture Network (W-FAN), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship/Division of Soil Conservation and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

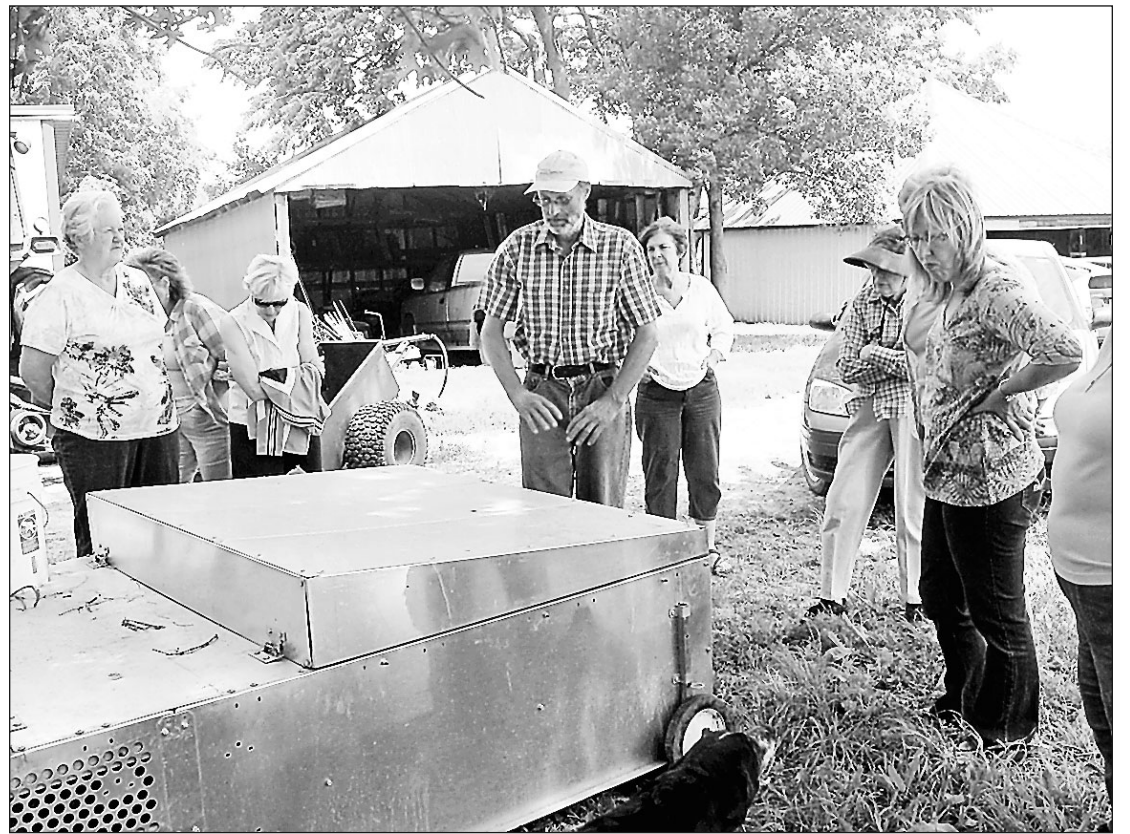
Two women in agriculture from Iowa led the day's activities. Lynn Heuss of the Iowa Farmers Union and Jean Eells of EResources Group invited the women participants to speak about their particular farming operation.

"We hope to connect women across the world through this project," Heuss said. "Gathering information to make your operation successful is our goal; bringing you to a place to talk to other people, mainly women."

Studies show women own one-third of the land in Nebraska and one-half of the land in Iowa, but women are not usually included in discussions of the land or conservation practices. The day meeting explored what knowledge the women had of conservation and any implementation they had been involved with.

But the morning discussion opened many other avenues for the women to discuss. Being a sustainable producer is becoming more important in today's ag field and consumers seem to want this more and more. By making social connections with other farmers, economic practices and successes can be shared.

Women are not usually part of neither conservation conversations nor decisions. But this pilot program hopes to change that by making women more aware of conservation and hear what other women have to say. It is hoped to create a network for the program where other women's stories can



Martin DeBlauw, an organic farmer near St. James, Neb., discusses his grazing operation with attendees at the "Women Caring For the Land" pilot workshop that was held recently. The Center For Rural Affairs sponsored the event.

PHOTO: LINDA WUEBBEN

be shared, sources of funding they found to be helpful can be listed and good old-fashioned learning will result.

So, the women present for the session shared their personal stories of involvement in agriculture whether it was on a family farm with their husband or son or as an owner of farmland or another ag-related business. Heuss took notes for the project event to be compiled and shared.

Phyllis McCain of Norfolk talked about farming with her husband near Crofton but also the desire to restore her grandmother's homestead in rural Norfolk. She has found a happy medium and thrives working on both farming projects.

"I like making my own decisions on my farm," said McCain. "I tell my husband he can make the decisions on his farm." It was hard to stick up for herself in a man's world but she didn't let it stop her. She is planning on starting a business where she will harvest prairie wild flower seeds and retail them.

"Women should be involved in the decision-making and this is a great opportunity for women to talk to each other," said McCain. "We need more of this."

Another Dixon County woman

wanted answers to help her make decisions on the farmland she and her husband owned. He placed their land in a trust and has passed away. Her life has gotten very complicated because the land is tied up in the trust.

Alexandra McClanahan Shively, a native of Neligh, has purchased 226 acres in Antelope, Holt and Knox counties during the last 10 years. She divides her time between her Nebraska farmland and her Alaska home where her husband lives. Her Alaskan friends have named her Nebraska farm Sht'uh, which translates into "my special place."

"My mother told me it was the best decision I ever made," said Shively. She struggles with the way the land was treated in the past and is consuming information about correct farming practices and the addition of conservation opportunities.

Angela Jackson is a single mother from Vermillion who has taken the necessary steps to become an organic farmer. Her main base of operation, Prairie Sun Organics, is a poultry program based in Iowa that she markets in Nebraska and South Dakota also. She recently made the move from Iowa to South Dakota. She also works as an organic inspector.

Jackson's latest project is a vision to create a local foods coop and processing center which will be located in downtown Vermillion. She is working with 20 other vendors of organic products and hopes to see the doors of the Upper Missouri Valley Local Foods Project open this fall.

Along the journey Jackson used USDA programs whenever she could and beat down doors to make things happen. She is proud to be the first woman in Iowa to qualify for money to farm.

"It's been a rewarding journey and I wouldn't change one thing for a minute," said Jackson. "Sometimes it is hard to get the strength to get out there and change things and I have begged, but I believe in this."

And there were more women ready to share and they are finding they are not so shy anymore.

Consumers are looking for better diets and women have traditionally been the chief cook in the kitchen said Heuss. Farmers deserve respect and gardening today has become a valuable economic endeavor.

"There is room for everyone at the table," said Heuss. "We put athletes on such a high pedestal but we need to realize we can't live without food."

Hot Temps Could Result In Heat Stress In Cattle

BROOKINGS — Cattle producers should be aware that forecasted weather conditions could result in significant heat stress issues in cattle.

The U.S. Meat Animal Research Center predicts danger or emergency conditions through most of South Dakota beginning today (Saturday) and extending well into next week. In addition to afternoon temperatures forecast in the mid to upper 90s, recent moisture and humidity increases the risk of a more intense heat stress event, according to Extension Beef Feedlot Specialist Ben Holland. Although some cloud cover and isolated thunderstorms are forecasted for Sunday, many areas will be hot and sunny most of the day and cattle could really start to suffer on Monday and Tuesday of next week.

Cattle in feedlots are generally the most impacted in high heat conditions, and steps should be taken to prevent heating of cattle and allow cattle to adequately dissipate heat. Providing shade can reduce the amount of heat accumulation in cattle, but it is important to remember that shade is more effective when adequate air movement through the shaded areas is possible. The same kind of shelter that helps keep animals warm in the winter can be a detriment for keeping them cool in the summer. During hot summer days, cattle accumulate internal heat, which must be released during the night time. When nighttime low temperatures are above 70 degrees Fahrenheit, especially for extended periods of time, heat removal is

not very affective.

According to Holland, "The most important thing cattle feeders can do to help cattle cool off at night is by sprinkling mounds in dirt pens late in the evening or at night. This provides a cool place for cattle to lay down, allowing the heat to dissipate. Cattle can be sprayed directly during the day as well, but if cattle are sprayed, large water droplets should be used. Too fine a mist will only add humidity and make problems worse."

Producers should provide extra water such as supplemental tanks to pasture or feedlot animals. Animals will congregate by water sources when it is hot, so adding more water sources can spread animals out and allow every animal a chance to drink. The ability of the water system to deliver volume must also be considered and monitored, and alternative water methods for water delivery should be considered.

Dr. Kelly Bruns, SDSU Professor of Animal Science said, "Cattle need to start preparing for the heat today by figuring out what auxiliary water sources are available if cattle need extra water to drink and how is water going to be delivered to sprinkle pen mounds and cattle."

He added, "whether you need to work with the local fire department or borrow a water truck to carry water, this needs to be figured out before Saturday evening

when it is likely that cattle will start showing signs of stress in some areas."

Producers should also avoid moving, processing, hauling, or otherwise handling animals in hot weather. If these actions are unavoidable, they should be done in very early morning hours. Getting cattle used to being sprayed while it is still cooler can help prevent panic and stress when they are sprayed later.

Symptoms of heat stress in animals range from mild to severe as conditions worsen. Initially, animals will increase their respiratory rate in an attempt to cool themselves. Increased salivation and open-mouth breathing will commence, and in severe cases of heat stroke, animals will become uncoordinated, weak, and go down and not be able to rise. When these latter symptoms hit, recovery is unlikely.

Some animals will likely be more severely affected than others. Producers should pay close attention to dark-hided animals, fleshy animals, or animals with histories of respiratory disease.

Heat stress symptoms peak in the early evening hours after the animal's body attempts to regulate its temperature and fails. Holland recommends, "The most important thing is to be prepared to take steps to intervene before severe signs of heat stress manifest themselves."

More details, including heat stress prediction maps, are available online from the US Meat Animal Research Center (<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Main/doc/cs.htm?docid=21306>). The SDSU Extension Extra 11011 "Handling Heat Stress in Cattle" provides helpful information as well.

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