

Proposition 2 —Improvements for Animals in Factory Farms

By Kay Bushnell

Today, nearly all animals raised for their meat or eggs in this country are in factory farms, also known as Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs). The animals are crowded into tiny spaces and denied many natural behaviors and movements. Calves raised for veal, pregnant pigs, and egg-laying hens are crammed into cages and pens that crowd them so tightly that they cannot turn around or extend their limbs.

(www.sierraclub.org/factoryfarms) Their concentrated feces seep into waterways and drinking water; noxious odors and toxic gases from their manure foul the air of the surrounding area; and the greenhouse gases they emit contribute to global warming.

At last California voters will have a chance to end some abuses that are an integral part of most veal, pork, and egg production. Proposition 2 mandates modest improvements for three factory farmed animals: calves raised for veal, pregnant pigs, and egg-laying hens. It requires that they be allowed “for the majority of every day to fully extend their limbs or wings, lie down, stand up, and turn around.”

If members of the public were permitted to enter the buildings that contain the confined animals, and if they could tolerate the gaseous stench, they would witness what few have seen. Calves destined for veal are taken from their mothers soon after birth and tethered by their necks in crates too narrow for them to turn around or lie down comfortably. After four months of confinement they are slaughtered.

Pregnant sows are kept in barren metal stalls only two feet wide, preventing them even from turning around. These intelligent animals suffer immensely, both mentally and physically. Approximately 19 million laying hens in California are confined in barren battery cages that are stacked one upon the other. Each hen is limited during her whole life to a space that is smaller than a piece of binder paper.

“Confining animals in these cages and crates is worse than human beings suffering confinement in a middle airplane seat for [their] entire lives,” says Wayne Pacelle, President of the Humane Society of the United States.

According to Paul Shapiro, spokesman for Californians for Humane Farms, Proposition 2 will put an end to the caging of egg laying hens although it will not prohibit the common practices of killing all male chicks, mutilating hens’ beaks, and raising them entirely indoors. It will encourage keeping veal calves and pregnant sows in group housing where they can walk around and socialize, giving them “some basic ability to engage in the simplest movements,” says Shapiro.

Supporters of Proposition 2 include the Sierra Club California, the Union of Concerned Scientists, Organic Consumers Association, Dr. Jane Goodall, Michael Pollan, author and

educator Bill McKibben, Frances Moore Lappe, Eric Schlosser, Molly Katzen, Senator Dianne Feinstein, and many family farmers, veterinarians, and advocates for safe food.

Arizona, Florida, Colorado, and Oregon have already approved ballot initiatives to curtail abuses of CAFOs. All 27 nations of the European Union have passed legislation banning veal crates, sow gestation crates, and battery cages.

The Pew Commission on Industrial Animal Production, an independent panel that includes former U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, veterinarians, and farmers, calls the changes required by California ballot measure "the types of modest animal welfare public policy improvements that the [Pew] Commissioners recommend implementing." "Practices that restrict natural motion such as the use of sow gestation crates induce high levels of stress in the animals and threaten their health," say the Commissioners. The Commission notes that such maltreatment of farm animals has created "an ethical dilemma...that transcends objective scientific measures...."

While Proposition 2 will not end the factory farm system, many hope that it will be the beginning of the end. According to Californians for Humane Farms, published research shows that it costs producers less than one additional penny per egg not to confine laying hens in battery cages.

In the meantime, if we deplore the environmental damage and mistreatment of animals inherent in factory farming we can take action immediately. We can choose to live "off the grid" of the factory farm system and switch to a 100% plant-based diet. By preparing our meals with seasonal vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds and skipping the products of factory farms we can enjoy food that tastes wonderful and keeps both us and the earth healthy.

Information: www.humanecalifornia.org

Loma Prieta Chapter Kay Bushnell has taught plant-based cooking and appeared as The Garden Gourmet in a community-access television cooking series.