

SILENCE IS NOT GOLDEN

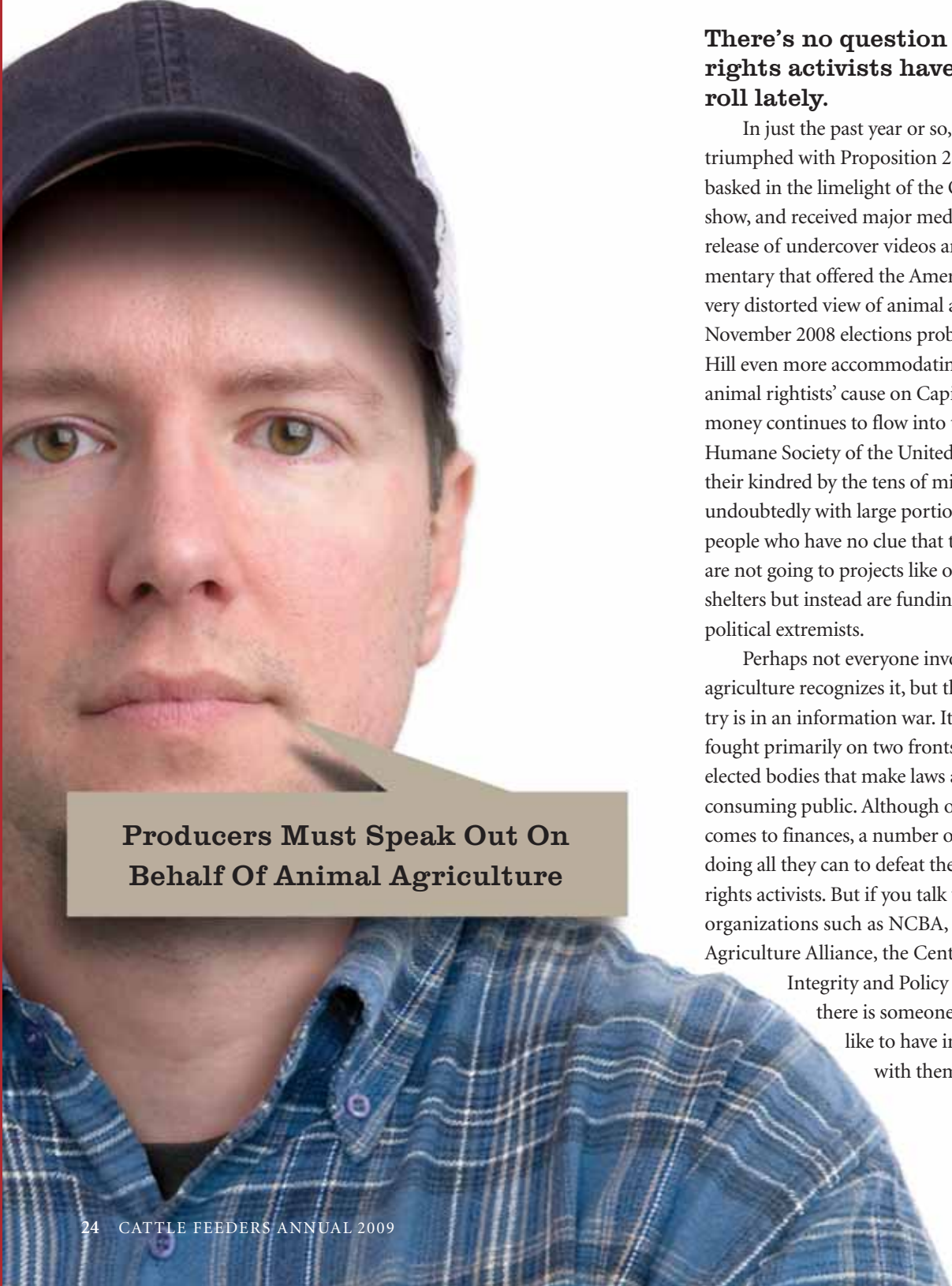
BY JAMES HUNT

There's no question that animal rights activists have been on a roll lately.

In just the past year or so, they have triumphed with Proposition 2 in California, basked in the limelight of the Oprah Winfrey show, and received major media play with the release of undercover videos and an HBO documentary that offered the American consumer a very distorted view of animal agriculture. The November 2008 elections probably made Capitol Hill even more accommodating to the radical animal rightists' cause on Capitol Hill. And the money continues to flow into the coffers of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and their kindred by the tens of millions of dollars — undoubtedly with large portions coming from people who have no clue that their donations are not going to projects like operating animal shelters but instead are funding the activities of political extremists.

Perhaps not everyone involved in animal agriculture recognizes it, but the livestock industry is in an information war. It is a war being fought primarily on two fronts — one being the elected bodies that make laws and the other the consuming public. Although outgunned when it comes to finances, a number of organizations are doing all they can to defeat the agenda of animal rights activists. But if you talk with folks from organizations such as NCBA, TCFA, the Animal Agriculture Alliance, the Center For Food

Integrity and Policy Directions Inc., there is someone else they would like to have in the trenches with them.



**Producers Must Speak Out On
Behalf Of Animal Agriculture**



MASTERS OF BEEF ADVOCACY

How To Win Friends And Influence People To Support The Cattle Industry

The Masters of Beef Advocacy (MBA) is a new program with a simple objective: Help prepare cattlemen to join the front lines in the battle against the poisonous propaganda of animal rights activists.

“The beef industry is under attack from activists claiming that modern beef production is harmful to the environment, cruel to animals and bad for your health,” said Daren Williams, executive director of NCBA Communications. “The top three anti-animal ag groups have an annual budget three times larger than the beef checkoff. While we can’t outspend them, we can mobilize an army of beef advocates at the grassroots level to share the story of modern beef production with consumers in our local communities and in the virtual world online.”

Funded by the Beef Checkoff, MBA is a series of free online courses open to beef producers and industry allies such as students, third party experts, chefs, dieticians and restaurant owners. MBA candidates will be required to complete six courses in beef advocacy, including:

- Modern Beef Production — Sharing the many benefits of modern, efficient U.S. beef production
- Animal Care — Explaining the industry’s commitment to raising healthy animals
- Beef Safety — Communicating why producing safe food for consumers is a top priority
- Beef Nutrition — Explaining how great-tasting beef strengthens and sustains our bodies
- Environmental Stewardship — Sharing how we’re protecting the environment for future generations
- The Beef Checkoff — Communicating the value of your investment in growing demand for beef

MBA is a self-paced program that will take most participants less than ten hours to complete. You can enroll any time throughout the year and do the courses on your own schedule.

Williams said, “MBA will train, equip and motivate beef producers and industry allies to be everyday advocates in the media, our children’s classrooms and on the internet.”

Following completion of the courses, each candidate will be invited to attend a full day “final exam/graduation” ceremony focusing on online advocacy, public speaking and working with the media.

To enroll in the MBA program, just send an e-mail to MBA@beef.org and request an application.

You. The person reading this article at this moment. The American livestock producer.

Organizations aligned with animal agriculture express strong confidence that producers have a valuable role to play in turning the tide in the ongoing battle. Sadly, they also express frustration with the apparent reluctance of producers to speak out on behalf of their very way of life.

The Political Front

In identifying where and how producers can help, let’s look at the current landscape of this information war. It’s a sprawling landscape, literally from sea to shining sea as activists take their agenda across the country. They could be coming to a state capitol building near you, if they haven’t been there already.

Last year’s passage of California’s Prop 2 — which imposes new regulations on the confinement of laying hens, gestating sows and veal calves — represented animal rights activists’ latest success with the device known as the state ballot initiative. Previously animal rights measures had been passed on state ballots in Florida and Arizona.

Kay Johnson Smith, executive vice president of the Animal Agriculture Alliance, said voter approval of such measures has given activist groups “additional credibility to go to state legislatures in states that also have ballot initiatives. Essentially they’ve used that as a threat to say (to lawmakers), if you don’t pass legislation, we will be coming to your state next and writing a ballot initiative campaign.” Legislatures in two states — Oregon and Colorado — have yielded to such pressure and passed activist-promoted bills, said Johnson Smith. She noted that HSUS now has state directors — basically full-time lobbyists — in 30 states. Further bolstering HSUS’s effort at the state capitols is the ongoing recruitment of volunteers for what are known as “Humane Lobby Days.”

“Certainly we’ve seen an increase in the state outreach of the activist groups over the last couple of years,” said Johnson Smith, adding, “I think the reason for this is they have not had the success in Congress that they want in seeking any sort of additional federal regulation addressing animal welfare issues.” However, she believes it is a goal of activists to create such a messy hodge-podge of state regulations pertaining to animal welfare that Congress will feel compelled to step in and harmonize the rules through federal legislation.

If activists haven’t scored a huge success with Congress, it might be only a question of when. More and more Capitol Hill is considered a friendlier place for the animal rights agenda, according to Steve Kopperud, senior vice president of Policy Directions Inc. He said Members of Congress find it easy to vote for bills that supposedly protect animals. “They ask themselves: Who will be upset with me if I vote this way? It’s an

obvious vote — no problems. And the next thing we know we're dealing with the unintended consequences of the so-called easy vote."

Kopperud said the current situation with horse slaughter is a classic example of misguided policy gone awry. "When we had USDA-regulated processing, there were upwards of 90,000 horses being harvested on an annual basis at plants following not only USDA regulations but those of the European Union (EU) since the EU was the dominant market for horse meat. Now with state action and this continuing assault through the Congress, we're looking at over 110,000 abandoned and neglected horses across the country. And we have yet to hear any animal rights group come forward with a mechanism or scheme by which those animals will be taken care of."

Higher food costs are another unintended consequence likely to occur if Congress passes animal welfare legislation that hasn't been thought through very well. But if unwise regulation forces the public to buy less meat due to price inflation, that would merely fulfill activists' true ambition, said Kopperud. "There's an old axiom among animal rights groups that if you can't regulate them (animal agriculture) out of business or legislate them out of business, then cost them out of business."

Your Voice Is Needed

Johnson Smith and Kopperud agree that animal agriculture must become more assertive in making sure lawmakers don't buy into the fiction promoted by activists. And Colin Woodall, NCBA's executive director of legislative affairs, acknowledges there is an image problem to overcome.

"Unfortunately, there is a perception among many on Capitol Hill that all ag producers do is just abuse these animals until they get some money out of them and then they just move on to new animals to abuse," said Woodall.

Offering advice that can apply to both Congress and state legislatures, Woodall said producers need to build relationships with lawmakers and lawmakers' staffs to tell them about the good animal handling practices the cattle industry follows. (See the sidebar article *Proper Animal Care Is A Priority For Cattlemen* on page 140.)


"It's really up to producers to get out there, call their members of congress, and tell them their story. Invite the member of congress out to their operations and show them around. Educate them and show them that if you want to take care of animals, let agriculture do it because we know best," said Woodall.


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Reaching Out To Customers

Federal and state legislators are not the only ones who need to hear from livestock producers. The general public — a.k.a. consumers — also needs to hear the truth about animal agriculture. Remember, millions of these consumers saw the Oprah show last October when HSUS was allowed to pump its propaganda under the guise of informing a *national* television audience about the issues involved in a *state* ballot initiative —

California’s Prop 2. Many of these same consumers had their impressions of modern day animal agriculture shaped by the recent HBO documentary, “Death on a Factory Farm.” And who knows how many people still need convincing that the wrongful abuse of non-ambulatory dairy cattle exposed on videotape last year doesn’t represent standard beef industry practices.

Charlie Arnot, CEO of the Center For Food Integrity, says consumer research shows that treatment of food animals doesn’t rank very high in the average person’s list of day-to-day concerns. Not when compared to things like the U.S. economy, personal finances or the war in Iraq. But where animal welfare ranks in the list of overall concerns can be deceiving because, Arnot said, when surveyors ask consumers follow-up questions,

Proper Animal Care Is A Priority For Cattlemen

TCFA and NCBA Programs Help Train Producers

Humane treatment of animals is vital to the cattle industry. Always has been. Always will be. Unfortunately, much of the general public and many federal and state lawmakers are not aware of how well cattlemen treat their animals. Even worse, animal rights extremists are quite willing to offer up distorted images of what goes on in the cattle business in hopes of destroying it.

Cattlemen can help defeat the radical animal rights agenda by giving consumers and legislators confidence about the industry’s animal care practices. To do their part, cattlemen must be ready and willing to speak out about the value of compassionate animal handling. More importantly, must be able to demonstrate that they and their employees practice what they preach.

Fortunately, there are two excellent programs that can help cattlemen maintain superior levels of animal care: Beef Safety and Quality AssuranceSM (BSQA) offered by TCFA and Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) provided by NCBA and its state affiliates.

BSQA and BQA share an identical “Code of Cattle Care,” which emphasizes the following principles:

- Provide necessary food, water and care to protect the health and well-being of animals.
- Provide disease prevention practices to protect herd health, including access to veterinary care.
- Provide facilities that allow safe, humane and efficient movement and/or restraint of cattle.
- Use appropriate methods to humanly euthanize terminally sick or injured livestock and dispose of them properly.
- Provide personnel with training/experience to properly handle and care for cattle.
- Make timely observations of cattle to ensure basic needs are being met.

- Minimize stress when transporting cattle.
- Keep updated on advancements and changes in the industry to make decisions based upon sound production practices and consideration for animal well-being.
- Persons who willfully mistreat animals will not be tolerated.

Producers wanting to strengthen the animal care practices at their operations can get a wealth of information and guidance through these programs. The animal care instruction and training is approved and monitored by veterinarians and nutritionists. With successful completion of either program producers receive certification that they’ve proven their commitment to proper animal care.

TCFA Executive Vice President Ben Weinheimer said cattlemen trained through BSQA show a true devotion to their animals’ health and comfort. “Everyone in the cattle business knows that following the correct animal care procedures is the right way to go. Sometimes, however, the little things like having well-designed facilities and knowing how to properly administer animal health products are what makes the difference.”

Dr. Tom Field, NCBA’s executive director for producer education, said the fact that beef production continues to rise despite a shrinking U.S. cattle herd is a testament to the industry’s widespread acceptance of the animal care standards taught through BQA. “We’re very reassured by the response of people to adopt these practices when they’re educated about them, when they see the opportunity to improve the product and improve overall consumer demand and confidence in our product.”

If you would like to know more about TCFA’s BSQA program, go to <http://www.tcfa.org/BQAstate.html> or call TCFA at (806) 358-3681.

For more information about NCBA’s BQA program, go to <http://www.bqa.org/> or e-mail NCBA’s Director of BQA, Ryan Ruppert, at ruppert@beef.org.



“You discover there is a consumer expectation that the animals we use to provide meat, milk and eggs receive appropriate care.” He added that the food industry has not achieved a satisfactory level of trust among consumers on animal care.

“That lack of confidence and trust creates the opening for activists and detractors to come in and further their agenda, which ultimately is to reduce if not eliminate the consumption of meat,” Arnot said.

And here is where Arnot wants to rally producers to the cause. He says the Center’s research also shows that the public is far more likely to put faith in assurances about animal care when it’s the producer talking instead of someone representing the grocery or restaurant industries, for example. Arnot adds that the average consumer doesn’t want to be bombarded with a lot of science. Consumers will instead respond better to messages that show producers share their values when it comes to treating animals humanely.

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“What consumers really are looking for is just enough information to have permission to believe that the guy who produced my steak is doing the right thing, and that I can feel good about having this steak for dinner, and that having the steak for dinner and having a pet aren’t in conflict,” Arnot said.

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As for how animal agriculture can get the message out, Arnot says there are a number of options available. Local television newscasts remain the primary source of information for most Americans, according to the Center’s research. But, in this era of expanding communications technology, social media like MySpace, Facebook and Twitter also offer

new opportunities for producers to connect with consumers. The main thing is to be willing to speak out and to know what to say.

Of course, a lot of producers probably would like some training before they speak on behalf of the industry. Cattle-men are in luck as NCBA is offering the new Masters of Beef Advocacy (MBA) program. Funded by the Beef Checkoff, MBA is a free, online, self-paced course that most can complete in less than ten hours altogether. (*See the sidebar article Masters of Beef Advocacy on page 25.*)

The consequences of not winning the information war with animal rights activists can be dire. Take what happened across the Atlantic, for instance.

“Europe is an example we can learn from, both from their industry experiences and the mistakes of their governments,” said Dr. Elizabeth Parker, chief veterinarian for NCBA. “The

animal rights movement started there in the UK in the 1980s. And eventually they’ve almost regulated their live-stock industry out of business. Now they’re importing

cheaper meat protein into their countries than they can raise for themselves because of unnecessary and over-burdensome regulation.”

So, it’s time for cattlemen to be outspoken. And Kopperud advises producers to not be timid because, “There is no political consequence as ugly as losing your business. The fear that we might offend someone in this process is silly.”

EDITOR’S NOTE—James Hunt is the TCFA Communications Director.



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