

**Humane Society of the United States Agriculture Councils:  
From Contention to Cooperation**

**ENR 5600 Final Project**

**Catherine Becker**

My final project for ENR 5600 is a series of news stories that look at the background, formation, and members of the Agriculture Advisory Council of Ohio for the Humane Society of the United States. For this project I interviewed several people involved in the development of this series of state agriculture councils, as well as two members of the Ohio council.

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## The humane farming controversy in Ohio

In 2008, a ballot initiative backed by a coalition of groups including the Humane Society of the United States passed by a two-to-one margin in California.

[Proposition 2](#), as it was known, was fairly simple: It would phase out several conventional farming practices such as battery cages for egg-laying hens, gestation crates for pregnant sows, and veal crates for young calves, requiring them to “be confined only in ways that allow these animals to lie down, stand up, fully extend their limbs and turn around freely.”

Although [several other states](#) had previously passed similar measures – gestation crates banned in Florida in 2002, gestation crates and veal crates in Arizona in 2006, gestation crates in Oregon in 2007, and gestation crates and veal crates in Colorado in 2008 – the California initiative got the attention of agribusiness.

After spending almost \$9 million to defeat the measure, the opposition coalition led by the American Farm Bureau Federation [expressed deep disappointment](#) in the results, which they attributed to the ignorance of California voters and consumers.

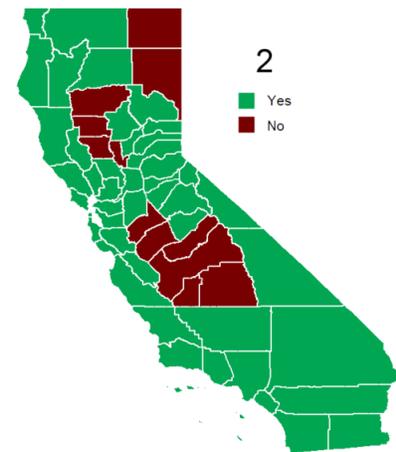
“The realities of modern, family-owned and -operated agriculture and the professional dedication of our farm families are largely not understood by America’s consumers. As an industry, we must help non-farmers understand our industry,” said Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman.

It may have been no wonder, then, that when leaders of the HSUS approached the Ohio Farm Bureau three months later about working together to develop livestock care standards for the state, they got the cold shoulder.

“Despite entreaties from The HSUS, the Ohio Farm Bureau refused to engage in any negotiations to find a political solution to the conflict over these confinement systems,” HSUS President Wayne Pacelle [wrote in his blog](#).

“Instead of having a serious sit-down with us, the Farm Bureau hatched a plan with lawmakers to try to thwart the prospective initiative,” Pacelle went on. “And in an act of willful obedience, the Legislature approved a resolution in two days that places a measure on the November 2009 ballot to amend the constitution to create an industry-dominated council that will decide all rules related to farm animal handling.”

The measure on the 2009 ballot, [known as Issue 2](#), would instill in the state constitution a new governing body under the Ohio Department of Agriculture called the Livestock Care Standards Board, which would set and enforce rules for animal care on livestock farms in the state.



*California 2008 Prop 2 results by county*



Ohio Issue 2 campaign sign

Although farm groups are not known for their support of government regulations, the Ohioans for Livestock Care coalition enjoyed large donations from the Ohio Farm Bureau, National Pork Producers Council, United Egg Producers, and 20 other conventional farm organizations.

“Issue 2 is about livestock, but it’s also about important choices,” the Ohio Farm Bureau vice president Jack Fisher [wrote in an editorial](#). “Should Ohioans or outsiders choose what’s best for Ohio? Should reasoned thought or raw emotion guide important choices? Should we choose what’s best for animals without considering what’s best for people? And yes, it’s a choice in favor of producing and consuming meat, milk and eggs.”

With [campaign signs](#) framing the initiative as “Safe, Local Food, Excellent Animal Care,” Issue 2 sailed through with Ohio voters approving it two to one -- the same margin as California voters had approved Prop 2 the previous year.

### A new ballot initiative

Humane groups wasted no time in responding to the passage of Issue 2. The day after the election, Pacelle [announced the HSUS’s intention](#) to launch a ballot initiative to “address tougher issues like gestation crates and battery cages in a serious manner.”

Issue 2 was [not real reform](#), Pacelle wrote, but “a transparent attempt to forestall an initiative, codify industry norms, and to place a handful of people – nearly all of whom are expected to support the status quo – in charge of all farm animal welfare rules and to let the CAFOs operate without further limits.”

In February 2010, the Ohioans for Humane Farms coalition – made up of the HSUS, Farm Sanctuary, Ohio SPCA, Ohio Sierra Club, Ohio League of Humane Voters, among others – [filed a petition](#) with the Ohio secretary of state to begin collecting signatures to put a Prop 2-like initiative on the Ohio ballot.

It was a colossal undertaking. More than 400,000 valid signatures would be needed because the measure had to pass not just as a statute but as an [amendment to the Ohio constitution](#), since the livestock care board had been created as part of the state constitution. Many more than that would need to be collected to ensure enough signatures were valid. And the coalition had [just a few months](#) to gather them all before the June 30 deadline.



At stake were standards for [160 large-scale industrial farms](#) listed as Confined Animal Feeding Operations by the Ohio Department of Agriculture, as well as up to 4,000 more unpermitted operations that barely missed the threshold for this classification.

Throughout the spring of 2010, [more than 6,000 volunteers](#) fanned out to collect signatures across the state at community festivals, fairgrounds, parades, churches, workplaces, and even Walmart parking lots. [Paid signature gatherers](#) were used to supplement volunteer work.



*The Ohio Farmers tour stopped for lunch at Chipotle, which had endorsed the campaign. Shown are (left to right), Kevin Fulton, Tom Harrison, and Bruce Rickard. Photo credit: Ohioans for Humane Farms*

In May a group of farmers who supported the initiative toured the state with stops in Cleveland, [Columbus](#) and Cincinnati. On board were Kevin Fulton, grassfed beef farmer from Nebraska; Tom Harrison, sheep farmer in Wood County and campaign treasurer; Bruce Rickard, owner of Fox Hollow Farm in Fredericktown; and Joe Logan, beef farmer and director of agricultural programs at the Ohio Environmental Council.

But campaign was not without controversy, as Ohioans for Humane Farms accused the Farm Bureau of [sending operatives](#) to harass volunteers and block people from signing the ballot petition. For its part, the Farm Bureau admitted to sending people to “observe and document” while circulating its own petition in support of the livestock care board.

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the most inflammatory turn of events took place when the vegan animal rights group Mercy for Animals released video from an [undercover investigation](#) showing a farm hand engaging in sickening abuse of cows and calves at Conklin Dairy Farm in Plain City.

The video – which documented Billy Joe Gregg punching young calves in the face, body slamming them to the ground, using pitchforks to stab cows in the face, legs and stomach, kicking downed cows in the face, beating restrained cows in the head with crowbars, and twisting cows’ tails until the bones snapped – exploded on the national stage. National news programs covered the case, celebrities such as Alec Baldwin condemned the abuse, and dozens of Facebook pages appeared calling for punishment or worse of both Gregg and Conklin.



*A still from the Mercy for Animals video showing Billy Joe Gregg stabbing cows in the udders with a pitchfork.*

Then an extreme animal rights group called Negotiation is Over released an [announcement from organizer Gary Yourofsky](#) calling for a massive protest at the farm on Memorial Day. “I am asking everyone who cares about justice and injustice to bring bolt cutters, bats, crowbars, pitchforks, hammers and wrenches to help destroy every piece of equipment the farm has, and tear down the sheds,” Yourofsky wrote. “TOGETHER WE WILL DISASSEMBLE THE FARM PIECE BY PIECE AND SHUT DOWN THIS PLACE OF TORTURE!!!”

Mercy for Animals, as well as HSUS and Farm Sanctuary, which had offered to take all the Conklin cows, condemned the protest, asking activists not to attend. On Memorial Day [150 officers from four counties](#) lined the highway near Conklin Farm. Yourofsky later claimed to have infiltrated the farm with three other people, but provided no evidence this had taken place.

Gregg was charged with 12 counts of animal cruelty, all misdemeanors with a total combined sentence of 18 months in prison. He later pleaded guilty to six counts and was sentenced to 18 months with 10 month suspended and credit for time served. By early 2011 he was out of jail. He still lives in the Columbus area under the name Billy Joe Remington.

## Buckeye Compromise

As the campaign deadline approached, tensions began to mount. [Opponents commented](#) on the Ohioans for Humane Farms Facebook page claiming the goal of the ballot initiative was to end production of all beef, pork and eggs and force Ohioans into a vegan diet. Many debated the Conklin video, and volunteers traded stories of gathering signatures and in some cases being harassed. By June 24, the campaign announced it had gotten the [required number of signatures](#), but would keep gathering more to act as a cushion for those ruled invalid.

Then on June 30, the day the campaign was to have delivered more than half a million signatures to the Ohio Secretary of State, the [HSUS](#), [Farm Bureau](#), and Gov. Ted Strickland held a sudden joint press conference to announce a [last minute agreement](#) between the two camps.

Included in the agreement were [eight major points](#) of which five related to farm animal welfare:

- The Ohio Farm Bureau would recommend that the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board pass the ballot initiative language calling for humane euthanasia of farm animals according to American Veterinary Medical Association guidelines.
- OFB would recommend the OLCSB pass standards banning downer animals that could not walk from being slaughtered for the food supply.
- OFB would recommend the OLCSB pass standards to phase out crates for veal calves within seven years, in agreement with the American Veal Association.
- OFB would recommend the OLCSB pass standards to phase out gestation crates for pregnant sows by 2025, with no new gestation crates facilities to be built.
- OFB would recommend the OLCSB instruct the Ohio Department of Agriculture to deny permits for any new battery cage egg facilities. Current facilities could continue, but a pending application for a 6 million-hen facility in Union County would be denied.



*Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland (center) announces the humane farms agreement negotiated between the Ohio Farm Bureau, represented by Jack Fisher (left) and the Humane Society of the United States, represented by Wayne Pacelle (right). Credit: Progress Ohio*

The other three points covered animal legislation not related to farms which the HSUS had been trying to pass in Ohio but which had repeatedly failed:

- The Ohio Department of Agriculture and Ohio Department of Natural Resources would coordinate to take action on dangerous wild animals, including a ban on possession and sale of big cats, bears, primates, large constricting and venomous snakes, alligators and crocodiles. Current owners would be grandfathered in but could not breed new animals.
- OFB would recommend that the legislature pass a pending bill to regulate high-volume dog breeders.
- OFB would recommend that the legislature pass a pending bill to increase penalties for cockfighting to a felony.

In return for these points of agreement, the HSUS would not submit the signatures it had gathered to the Secretary of State, nor would it pursue a ballot initiative. Instead, it would make a statement supporting the work of the OLCSB and work with the board moving forward.

Despite the comprehensive nature of the agreement and the advantages for both sides, it was not greeted enthusiastically by grassroots supporters in either camp. “HSUS, OHF and Parcell committed fraud on the citizens and voters of Ohio,” said one disgruntled signature gatherer. “Give me a break. GIVE ME A BALLOT!!!!” said another. “Jack Fisher & the governor sold-out Ohio agriculture, pure and simple,” said a comment on the Ohio Farm Bureau page.

Even more disapproving was the [Animal Agriculture Alliance](#), which said, “Ohio’s agricultural leadership has succumbed to pressures from the Humane Society of the United States, a national animal rights group that has effectively undermined the authority of the newly-established board by imposing restrictions that mandate the way that producers can care for their animals.”

Yet as leaders on both sides worked to smooth out disappointment from their supporters, the agreement did move forward. During 2011 the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board approved all five of the farm animal welfare points, which went into effect September 29. “Yes, it’s been a struggle,” Ohio agriculture director Jim Zehringer [told the Columbus Dispatch](#), “but we had so many public meetings and so much public input that we’ve worked through it.”

“We’re hoping this sets a model for the nation in negotiating instead of a bitter political battle,” HSUS’s Pacelle said. [Later he blogged](#), “Implementing these reforms in Ohio via any pathway other than a ballot initiative would have been unthinkable just a couple years ago. But if our movement is going to succeed, we need to open up dialogue and to turn adversaries into allies.”

Subsequent years saw enactment of the non-farm animal points of the agreement, including the [Dangerous Wild Animals Act](#), which passed in 2012 in the wake of the tragedy in Zanesville in which a private zoo owner released dozens of lions, tigers, bears, monkeys and wolves before killing himself. Over 50 of the animals had to be killed.

In 2013, the legislature passed the [Commercial Dog Breeding Act](#) to regulate puppy mills for which Ohio had become notorious. Both the exotic animal and puppy mill legislation followed the model of farm animal regulation by creating an advisory board to set standards by which owners and breeders had to operate, and empowered the Ohio Department of Agriculture to perform inspections and remove animals or shut down operations of those not complying.

Still unfinished is the felony cockfighting law, which [died in committee last year](#) despite support from the Ohio Poultry Association and Ohio Farm Bureau. Ohio remains one of only 10 states that do not have felony penalties for this blood sport.



The screenshot shows a news article from The Columbus Dispatch. The headline is "All sides hail new livestock-care rules" with a sub-headline "State to pioneer broad standards on managing, moving, slaughter". The article is by Alan Johnson, dated Monday August 28, 2011 8:03 AM. It includes social media sharing options for comments, recommendations, and tweets. A photo of Jim Zehringer is visible, with a caption: "State agriculture chief Jim Zehringer, seen in front of an Ohio Historical Society photo, acknowledges that the process was a struggle but credits public input in the sweeping result." The article text includes: "OHIO LIVESTOCK CARE STANDARDS Comprehensive rules address issues species by species. Some significant changes and facts: Bovine: veal, dairy and beef cows Veal 'crates' (24 inches wide, 66 inches long) must be eliminated by Jan. 1, 2018. 'Tail docking' (surgical removal on dairy cattle) is eliminated by Jan. 1, 2018. Ohio has 15,000 large and small beef cattle farms, producing 325,000 cattle annually." The article concludes with "The swords of what promised to be a fierce battle at the ballot box have been molded into plovshares as Ohio's first-ever livestock-care standards kick in on Sept. 29."

Front-page story in *The Columbus Dispatch* the day the new livestock care rules went into place.

## HSUS Agriculture Councils: An idea is born

Kevin Fulton, a grassfed beef rancher from Nebraska, stood in the kitchen of the Holiday Inn in Lincoln with Wayne Pacelle and Paul Shapiro, the president and vice president of the Humane Society of the United States.

It was November 21, 2010, and the three men were waiting for the start of a town hall meeting with more than 150 Nebraska farmers that Fulton had organized for Pacelle.

Pacelle and Shapiro had challenged Fulton, a former weightlifting champion and coach, to prove his claim that he could roll up a frying pan with his bare hands. Armed with a pan from the hotel kitchen, Fulton did just that as the two HSUS leaders watched, mouths agape.



*Kevin Fulton rolls up a frying pan before a speaking event in New York. It's a stunt he's asked to do often. Photo credit: Troy Bishopp*

Leading up to the town hall meeting was a great deal of publicity – not all of it good. In particular, HumaneWatch, a front group created by the food and agriculture public relations firm Center for Consumer Freedom, [posted five questions](#) for attendees to ask Pacelle and [took out a billboard](#) in Lincoln blasting the HSUS.



*Billboard posted in downtown Lincoln, Neb., near the hotel where the town hall meeting took place.*

Agriculture groups in the state were buzzing about the event, many speculating that Pacelle was going to announce a new ballot initiative in Nebraska. “I’m surprised Mr. Pacelle would try this,” [one commenter wrote](#). “This past summer I was a counselor at the 39th Annual Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute and the governor himself said (in stronger words) that the views of HSUS make them unwelcome guests in this state due to the adverse effect they will have on our economy and the well being of our citizens and he will personally show them across state lines.”

“HSUS is a radical animal rights organization that wants to end any human use of animals, including food, entertainment, and laboratory testing,” said one comment to a [news story announcing the event](#). “They display innocent tactics, trying to pass them off as improving animal welfare, when in reality they are trying to destroy animal agriculture.”

The HSUS “is not the national office for our local humane societies, but rather an activist organization whose main goal is to end animal agriculture, hunting and research,” Nebraska veterinary student [Jake Geis wrote](#) in an opinion piece. “It capitalizes on the confusion of using the words ‘humane society’ in its name to sucker unsuspecting people into donating to them and not to the local humane societies where the money is desperately needed.”

For his part, Fulton was completely aware of the controversy the event had caused. “No doubt, I’ve gone out on a limb in hosting this meeting,” Fulton [told the Kearney Hub](#). “I’m promoting what I believe in. I don’t think it’s right to stuff animals in cages and crates. ... I’m a farmer who is not afraid to stand up and say, ‘I think this is wrong and we need to do something about it.’”

With growing consumer awareness of animal welfare, Fulton said, “I think it’s obvious that there are gonna be changes in the future, whether you like it or not.” He thinks it’s better for farmers to be at the table where decisions are being made than in the background throwing stones. At the same time, “I would like to see changes without going through an initiative,” he [told the Lincoln Journal-Star](#).



Kevin Fulton owns a 2,800-acre grassfed beef operation in Litchfield, Neb. Photo: HSUS

While in Nebraska, Pacelle took the opportunity to [tour Fulton Farm](#) in Litchfield, a 2,800 acre organic beef operation with up to 1,800 head of cattle as well as lamb and poultry. While there, Fulton [brought up a new idea](#): Just as it has a dog breeders advisory council, why not form a council of farmers to guide and advise the HSUS?

“I knew the HSUS was behind the curve on this,” Fulton said in an interview. “It was too easy for the opposition to claim the HSUS was anti-agriculture and wouldn’t work with farmers. If we could form an advisory council made up of farmers and ranchers, it would prove the HSUS isn’t anti-meat or out to abolish animal agriculture – plus I wouldn’t feel so alone in the ag sector.”

The idea took root. Meetings with key players around the country began, and in April 2011 the HSUS hired [Joe Maxwell](#), a pig farmer and former lieutenant governor of Missouri, as its new vice president of rural outreach and engagement. Chief among Maxwell’s duties was to oversee the development of agriculture advisory councils in several states.



Nebraska Farmers Union President John Hansen announced the Nebraska Farmers Council at a joint press conference with HSUS. Photo: Farm Progress

First up was Nebraska, where the HSUS and Nebraska Farmers Union held a [joint press conference](#) on October 18, 2011, to [announce the formation](#) of the Nebraska Agriculture Council. The event was the culmination of talks between the two groups about how to proceed in the state. The HSUS agreed not to pursue a ballot initiative in Nebraska, but to work with farmers to build a market for locally raised and humane meat in the state.

NFU President John Hansen [told the Omaha World-Herald](#) his group had participated in the negotiations because the HSUS’s 51,000 members, donors and volunteers in Nebraska could open doors to potentially lucrative markets. “They have marketing expertise, membership and financial resources ... I’d rather see (their) members’ money spent to create value-added ag production than financing damaging and expensive state ballot issues,” he said.

Also shaping the dialogue was a recent [poll from University of Nebraska-Lincoln](#) showing that Nebraska voters supported humane treatment of farm animals, and they wanted all interested parties with a stake in the debate – farmers, consumers, food safety experts, and animal welfare groups – to come together and avoid a divisive campaign. Of rural residents polled, [69 percent said](#) animal welfare includes not just food, water, and shelter, but also adequate exercise, space, and activities.

Pacelle of HSUS also [applauded the development](#). “I believe together we can promote more humane and sustainable agriculture by highlighting best practices and connecting consumers with products coming from farms that do not rely on extreme confinement practices,” he said.

Founding members of the council included Fulton; Jim Knopik, livestock producer with North Star Neighbors; Martin Kleinschmit, a Nebraska organic farmer, cow calf producer and NFU board member; and Doug Dittman, a Nebraska dairy producer from Branched Oak Farm.

Fulton [told Grist magazine](#) that the goal of the Nebraska Agriculture Council was to nurture demand for locally raised humane meat and dairy. “It’s a way to keep young farmers on the farm, where they can raise a product out on the land and sell it into local markets and get a premium,” he said. That way, “they don’t have to slave to raise pigs for some large company, or raise chickens for Tyson or Perdue. They can be independent, the way they should be.”

### A chilly reception

Yet despite the market-based approach of the council, conventional agriculture organizations in the state did not welcome news of the alliance between NFU and HSUS.

“We are shocked and disappointed that any Nebraska agriculture group would align itself with an extreme animal rights organization such as the Humane Society of the United States,” [said Pete McClymont](#), director of [We Support Agriculture](#), an alliance of five groups -- Nebraska Farm Bureau, Nebraska Cattlemen, Nebraska Poultry Industries, Nebraska Pork Producers, and Nebraska State Dairy Association -- formed to counter any possible ballot initiative.



Noting the NFU had not been invited to join the WSA alliance, [Hansen shot back](#) that farmers would be better served by reforming markets than bashing HSUS. The number of pork producers in Nebraska has declined by 91 percent since 1980, he said. “They did not get put out of business by the Humane Society of the U.S. and animal rights groups. They got put out of business by dysfunctional and noncompetitive agricultural markets.”



*"We're going to kick your ass and send you out of the state," Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman said of the HSUS in a speech to the Nebraska Cattlemen. Photo: James R. Burnett, Omaha World-Herald*

Nebraska also had one thing Ohio did not: An irascible governor. As outrage about the HSUS Nebraska Agriculture Council spread across conventional agriculture organizations, Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman took full advantage by bashing the HSUS in speech after speech at agriculture meetings.

“This is about our American way of life, and HSUS wants to destroy the American dream for America's farmers and ranchers,” Heineman [told a national group of legislators](#) who head state legislative agriculture committees in January 2012. “This is about jobs for American families, and HSUS wants to destroy job opportunities for our sons and our daughters and our grandkids.”

Calling on lawmakers to help him fight HSUS, Heineman went on. “I’m a graduate of West Point. I’m an Army Ranger ... This guy wants to engage in guerrilla warfare, I’ll teach him a thing or two,” he said of HSUS president Pacelle.

Then [in a speech to the Nebraska Cattlemen](#) in March 2012, Heineman got a standing ovation when he said of HSUS, “We’re going to kick your ass and send you out of the state.”

Such grand-standing brought a sharp rebuke. HSUS state director Jocelyn Nickerson marched into the governor's office, newborn son in tow, to hand deliver a letter calling on Heineman to tone down the rhetoric. "I urge you to get off your soapbox and face the fact that a discussion about animal welfare in agriculture is not only appropriate, but necessary," [she wrote](#).

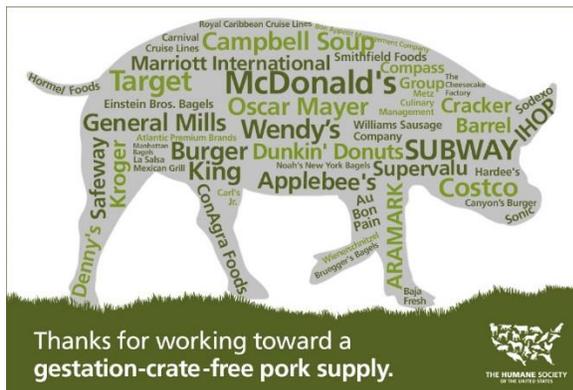
"What kind of politician says we shouldn't talk and we shouldn't forge agreements that are in the best interest of agriculture and animal welfare?" [Pacelle asked](#). "It's an ignorant statement."

"I would invite (Gov. Heineman) to visit my farm, as hundreds of others from around the world have done. But if he comes with the intention of kicking my children and me off our land, it would be a big mistake," [Fulton wrote](#) in a letter to the editor. "I am HSUS; I am Nebraska."

## The market speaks

Yet as the war of words was waged in Nebraska, events on the national scene began to make it irrelevant. As Fulton and others predicted, consumer demand began to shape the environment as changes in animal welfare standards [shifted from state legislatures to food corporations](#).

In 2011, Unilever became the first major food manufacturer to announce it would switch to cage-free eggs for all its products, and Smithfield recommitted to phasing out gestation crates from its supply chain. And in 2012, dozens of companies announced plans to phase out gestation crates:



*A graphic circulated by the HSUS in February 2013*

- Restaurants: McDonalds, Wendy's, Denny's, Sonic, Cracker Barrel, Carl's Jr., Baja Fresh, Subway, Jack in the Box, Bruegger's Bagels, Cheesecake Factory, Einstein Bros. Bagels, Arby's
- Grocery stores: Kroger, Costco, Harris-Teeter, Target, Supervalu
- Food distributors: Compass Group, Sodexo, Sysco, Bon Appetit
- Food manufacturers: Kraft, owner of Oscar Mayer; Hillshire Brands, owner of Jimmy Dean and Ballpark; ConAgra
- Other: Carnival Cruise, Royal Caribbean

2013 saw even more announcements about phasing out gestation crates from Au Bon Pain, Applebees, IHOP, Bob Evans, Tim Horton's, Quizno's, Papa John's, Roundy's Supermarkets, Marriott International, and General Mills. In addition, every leading Canadian grocery store including Walmart Canada, Costco Canada, Metro, Loblaw, Safeway Canada, Federated Co-operatives, Sobeys, and Co-op Atlantic issued a joint press release announcing a phase out.

Perhaps it was no surprise then that when Fulton arranged another visit by Pacelle to Nebraska in June 2013, the [atmosphere was entirely different](#). Gone were the paranoia, grand standing, and threats. As Pacelle toured the dairy farm of council member Doug Dittman, Hansen said he was very pleased with events. "I'm a big believer in the communication process. And I've never thought it was productive to spend a lot of time vilifying your opponents or their motives."

No one from We Support Agriculture was in attendance.

## The HSUS Agriculture Advisory Council of Ohio

It was a sunny 53-degree April day at the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus, where Karen Minton was trying to get everything set up for Humane Lobby Day. A record 200 people had registered to attend in 2013, nearly double the previous year's crowd, and there were lots of details to see to.

As Ohio state director for the Humane Society of the United States, it was Minton's job to organize the annual citizen's lobby day, making appointments with state legislators for each person attending, then briefing them on the issues and directing them around the 150-year-old maze that is the Ohio Statehouse to meet with their senators and representatives.

This year held another event of significance: the launch of the [HSUS Ohio Agriculture Council](#). That afternoon the five founding members of Ohio's council, the third for the HSUS after Nebraska and Colorado, would be introduced to animal advocates in the state. Minton wasn't sure what council members would say in their presentations or how they would be received.



*Almost 200 people attended the 2013 Ohio Humane Lobby Day organized by HSUS. Photo: HSUS Ohio*

Nationally the HSUS agriculture council program had encountered a mixed reception.

As is common in such situations, the main people who spoke out were those who didn't like it. Conventional agriculture groups were not fans, as the Nebraska experience had showed.

But neither were many longtime animal activists who based their philosophy on one principle: Thou shalt not kill animals. Any kind of meat means an animal's death, regardless of how that animal is treated in life.



*Joe Maxwell, HSUS vice president for rural outreach and engagement, is also a pig farmer in Missouri.*

“HSUS outreach director sends pigs ‘raised like children’ to slaughter” was the headline on an October 2011 story by [HumaneMyth.org](#), a website run by James LeVeck and Jenny Stein of Tribe of Heart, creator of the documentary [Peaceable Kingdom](#) about a farmer turned vegan.

Their story referred to Joe Maxwell, a pig farmer and the HSUS vice president of rural outreach and engagement, who had spoken at the press conference launching the Nebraska Agriculture Council about “moving 900 to 1100 fat hogs each week” for which he is paid \$1.04 a pound.

While vegan animal activists had not been enthusiastic about HSUS campaigns to phase out battery cages, gestation crates, and veal crates – they wanted to see no cages, not simply larger cages – once the HSUS moved into marketing meat, [they decided to draw the line](#).

When Paul Shapiro, HSUS vice president for farm animal protection, was invited to speak at the 2012 Animal Rights National Conference, a group of activists led by LaVeck tried to get the appearance cancelled. Then when Farm Animal Rights Movement, the group that organizes the annual conference, refused to cancel Shapiro's appearance, [LaVeck tried to organize a counter-conference](#) in the same hotel, a tactic that [FARM quickly got quashed](#).

Just as the outrage from conventional agriculture did not phase Kevin Fulton, the Nebraska farmer who had conceived of and pushed for the creation of the HSUS agriculture councils, neither did antipathy from some vegan animal rights activists. "When you are getting shot at from the extremes on both sides, you are about where you need to be," he said.

But Minton was dealing with both farmers and advocates on the ground in Ohio, and was understandably nervous. She needn't have worried – the event came off without a hitch – and with none of the divisiveness that characterized animal advocates on the national stage.



Warren Taylor (standing), owner of Snowville Creamery, spoke at the 2013 Ohio Humane Lobby Day. Seated (left to right) were council members Bruce Rickard, Mardy Townsend, Bill Miller, and Joe Logan. Photo: HSUS Ohio

"If folks are going to raise livestock and grow crops, then we need them to be as humane as possible and move away from the industrial farming practices, many call factory farming, that is not only inhumane to the animals, but also destroys the surrounding environment," [one commenter wrote](#) about the council on the HSUS Ohio Facebook page.

"Wonderful listening to you during Humane Lobby Day," [another commenter](#) told council member Warren Taylor, owner of Snowville Creamery in Meigs County. "I congratulate you on

your strong conviction and bravery. You brought tears to my eyes during your talk. My husband grew up on a family owned dairy farm in Creston, Ohio. His father had names for each of his cows. Thank you for making a huge difference in the lives of the animals."

"We simply must support these humane and sustainable farmers," a third commenter said. "They are getting squeezed from all sides, and it's our support that will keep them in business."

Besides Taylor of Snowville Creamery, [the Ohio council also includes](#):

- Bill Miller, cattle rancher in Butler County and vice president of the Ohio Farmers Union
- Bruce Rickard, owner of Fox Hollow Farm in Knox County
- Mardy Townsend, grassfed beef producer in Ashtabula County
- Joe Logan, owner of Logan Bros LLC and director of agricultural programs for the Ohio Environmental Council

Several members of the Ohio council have a history of working with HSUS. Townsend's mother, Marge, listed their former hog farm in the 1993-94 Humane Consumer and Producer Guide. Rickard appeared on the Ohio Farmers Tour during the humane farms campaign. And Logan participated in early talks about forming a national HSUS agriculture council.



*Karen Minton (right), Ohio state director for the HSUS, stands with Vicki Deisner, Midwest legislative director for the ASPCA (left), and Teresa Landon, director of the Ohio SPCA, at 2013 Ohio Humane Lobby Day. Photo: HSUS Ohio*

“The HSUS has been doing a good job of saying what is wrong with modern farming,” Minton said in an interview. “Now it was time for us to start talking about what is right.”

But just as conventional agriculture groups in Nebraska weren't pleased with the HSUS council, [neither were these groups in Ohio](#). “Our disappointment in what was announced by HSUS Wednesday is that this council not being inclusive,” said Mike Baumgartner, vice president of the Center for Food and Animal Issues with the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation.

“They have a very narrow focus in representation of agriculture within their council. Our approach has always been to have all aspects of agriculture represented. ... We support their effort to create a dialogue but we feel they fell a little short from the standpoint of not embracing all aspects of production agriculture.”

There was also early confusion over the council's name, as an [Ohio Agricultural Council](#) was already in existence. When the Ohio Farm Bureau brought this up, the HSUS acknowledged the confusion and changed its council name to the HSUS Agriculture Advisory Council for Ohio.

Still, some agriculture groups supported the formation of the HSUS council. “It's important that these farmers be a part of the conversation,” Renee Hunt, educational program director for the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, [told The Columbus Dispatch](#). “Our food system would look a lot different if people voted with their food dollars to match their ideals.”

Two months after the Ohio council was launched, the Miami Valley chapter of the Ohio Farmers Union [formally endorsed its work](#). “The two meetings of the Miami Valley Farmers Union in the past six months featured deep discussion and presentations from knowledgeable HSUS agriculture representatives,” chapter president and council member Bill Miller said. “Because of these meetings and the facts presented, there was enthusiastic, unambiguous and unanimous support for The HSUS Agriculture Advisory Council for Ohio.”

Currently council members and the HSUS are working on forming a cooperative to help market their products. They attended a [startup forum](#) sponsored by the Cooperative Development Center at Kent State University, but the project is “still in its infancy,” Townsend said.

## Mardy Townsend: Humane farmer, fracking activist

Of the members of the HSUS Agriculture Advisory Council for Ohio, Mardy Townsend sticks out immediately. She's the only woman.

As a female farmer, Townsend is rare, but not as rare as she used to be. According to the USDA, the number of female farmers in the United States has [tripled in the past 30 years](#), from 5 percent to 14 percent. Ohio is in the top 10 states for female farmers, with 29,060 women operating farms and 9,127 as principal farm owners.

Although female farmers don't have as much land or income as their male counterparts, they are older and more educated, [the USDA study showed](#). Many work in higher profit forms of farming such as livestock and specialty crops.

That profile [fits Townsend](#), who got a bachelor's degree in animal science and biology from Wilmington College in 1978, and a master's in agronomy from Ohio State in 1997. She is president of Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake Counties Farmers Union and on the board of the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association.

Townsend owns Marshy Meadows Farm, a grassfed beef operation of 225 acres near Windsor in Ashtabula County. Currently she has 104 head of Black Baldy cattle, less than she'd like because she had to cull during last summer's drought. She sells most of her beef to [Heinen's Fine Foods](#), an upscale grocery on the east side of Cleveland.



*Mardy Townsend walks through her herd of Black Baldy cattle at Marshy Meadows Farm in Ashtabula County. Photo: Thomas Ondrey, Cleveland Plain Dealer*

### Humane farming

Why did Townsend join the Ohio council? "Because Joe Maxwell is very persuasive," she said of the HSUS vice president for rural outreach and engagement. "He is really committed to helping humane farmers market their animals. The small to medium-sized farmer can't make it unless we differentiate our product."

Specifically, Townsend is working with John Dinon, HSUS Ohio director of outreach and engagement, to start a marketing cooperative in the state. The two attended a coop startup forum at the Kent State University Cooperative Development Center and will be putting together a model for beef coop in the coming year.

Despite working with the Humane Society of the United States, Townsend doesn't necessarily label her operation as "humane." "It's how I've always done it," she said. "I feel like I'm raising cattle in the way that's healthiest and most natural for them."

What's healthy for the cows also turns out to be healthier for people. Heinen's advertises the beef from Townsend's farm as having a healthier ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids, higher conjugated linoleic acid and Vitamin E, and lower fat than grain-fed beef.

For Townsend, pastured beef also makes economic sense. "My vet bills are really minimal because I don't push the animals," she said. "It's rare I have a problem."

Confinement operations, by contrast, constantly push the animals to grow faster and end up with chronic health problems, Townsend said. "Pinkeye, pneumonia, displaced hooves, displaced abomasum – the third stomach gets twisted around, and it's fatal."

Townsend thinks confinement operations are not sustainable in any way, economic or otherwise. "One reason they seem to be profitable right now is they have managed to externalize costs, shove them off on the taxpayer" she said. "The biggest way is with manure handling. Thousands of animals in a tiny space generate a lot of manure. It's got to go somewhere. It's very expensive to transport, not a high value item, not disposed of properly. It builds up in the soil and causes problems in places like Grand Lake St. Mary's," which has been closed several times due to large toxic algae blooms from manure runoff.

## Environmental conservation



*1 Townsend won the 2013 Stewardship Award from the Ohio Ecological Food and Farming Association. Photo: OEFFA*

Townsend's way of farming also turns out to be better for the environment. In 1996 she transitioned the farm, which had been in the family since her mother, Marge, bought the property in 1972, from hogs and crops to grassfed beef.

"Our land is very crummy – it's either wetland or highly erodible," she said. "It's not good for anything but grass. Most of it is very hilly and shouldn't be cropped. What's in the river lowlands is under water right now and will be until the end of May."

In 2000, Townsend put 175 acres of the property into a permanent conservation easement held by the Ashtabula County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. While she can use the land for farming, the easement means it can never be developed even if it sold to someone else.

This year Townsend won the [2013 Stewardship Award](#) from the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association.

"With almost 20 years of farming experience on her family's farm in northeast Ohio, Mardy has developed a successful, sustainable, and organic model for grassfed beef production," said Molly Bartlett, a 2007 recipient of the award who nominated Townsend. "A natural steward, Mardy's keen affection for her animals and the land and wise knowledge of her farm have guided her holistic management practices."

Townsend's environmental stewardship doesn't stop with her farming practices. She has also made her voice heard as a [citizen activist on fracking](#).

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is fracturing of rock by pressurized liquid in order to remove natural gas. Currently booming in eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania, fracking uses huge amounts of water mixed with toxic chemicals. The wastewater is then injected into its own wells, which critics say can cause earthquakes and contaminate underground water supplies.

Ohio has 181 injection wells which received nearly 170 million barrels of fracking waste between 2007 and 2010. In 2011, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources linked [12 earthquakes in Youngstown](#) to an unmapped faultline near a fracking wastewater well.

"It's a really bad idea," Townsend said of the shale energy boom. "There are four injection wells for frack waste in our township. With the boom in fracking, trucks from Pennsylvania have been coming with waste to put in the injection wells. I've read enough to know all well casings fail eventually. Injection wells will contaminate all the groundwater in Windsor."

"If our water wells were to become contaminated, livestock, vegetable, and small fruit production, organic or not, would not be possible," Townsend said. To help protect herself, she has paid for baseline water testing for her own wells.



*Mardy Townsend speaks during an anti-fracking rally at Price Park in North Canton. Photo: Ohio Citizen Action*

Yet she understands why farmers would lease their land to fracking companies: Crushing debt. Besides paying high veterinary bills, confinement farm owners go deep into debt to buy all the equipment needed, while conventional crop farmers borrow money to pay for chemical fertilizers and pesticides. One lease with a fracking company can get them out of debt for good.

While energy company representatives regularly visit Townsend's neighbors, they have never knocked on her door, maybe because of the "Stop Fracking" sign in her yard. After more than 100 people attended an informational meeting on fracking that she organized, a lot more homes in her area have the same sign.

## Fox Hollow Farm: Pasture raised permaculture

As we pulled up the long driveway to Fox Hollow Farm, a group of dogs ran down to meet us. Well, most of them ran. One basset hound doddered along on old rickety legs, trying but not succeeding at keeping up with the younger members of the pack.



*The Rickards' basset hound accompanied us on a tour of Fox Hollow Farm. Photos: Paul Becker*

“That’s Tilda,” said farm owner Bruce Rickard when we get to the house. “She’s 13 and not as fast as she used to be.”

Rickard runs the 285-acre Fox Hollow Farm northeast of Columbus with his wife, Lisa, son Jesse, and Jesse’s fiancée Chelsea. The Rickards bought the land in 1995 after retiring from 20-year careers in technology, he at Bell Labs and she at AT&T.

They raise cattle, hogs, sheep, broilers and layers entirely on pasture. Most of their products direct-marketed through farmer’s markets, food coops, restaurants, and a local delivery service.

Rickard is one of the founded members of the HSUS Agriculture Advisory Council for Ohio. He has been working with the HSUS since the humane farms campaign of 2010, when he appeared as part of a panel of farmers on the Ohio Farmers Tour across the state.

As Rickard took my husband, Paul, and me on a tour of his farm on a golf cart, Tilda jumped on board for the ride. First stop: The chicken processing house.

The Rickards send most of their animals for processing to a small slaughter plant called Dee Jay’s two miles down the road. But they slaughter and process the meat chickens on site.

Outside the building are posts with four cones attached at eye level. The chickens are put upside down in the cones where their throats are cut and they bleed out into a pile of sawdust. Then they are taken inside where they go through a steam bath, have the feathers plucked, and are processed for sale of meat.

“The law says we could do 1000 chickens per operator and have up to four operators,” Rickard explained. “But we don’t do that many ... I hate the job.”



*A hoophouse holds salad greens which the Rickards include in meat deliveries.*

By the time we toured in November, chicken processing season was over. But the building did contain two large refrigerators full of eggs from the layer hens, ready for delivery.

A hoophouse near building held beds of salad greens – mixed Asian, Swiss chard, and spinach. The Rickards add winter greens to their meat deliveries as a bonus. In early spring they will include root vegetables – carrots and potatoes.



*Chicken tractors let meat chickens graze on pasture. The solar array nearby provides 80 percent of the power needed by the farm.*

Next to the hoophouse on pasture were “chicken tractors.” These are covered pens that hold broiler chickens and can be moved around the pasture so the birds are constantly getting new grass, seeds, insects, and other things to eat. It’s part of the intensive grazing strategy used throughout the farm.

Also rotated on pasture are the pigs. Besides getting to engage in their natural rooting behavior, the pigs are fed a variety of items including ear corn, sunflower, artichokes, and mangos.

This year Rickard tried a new experiment of letting the laying hens live in the same pastures as the pigs. Because they grew up together there were no conflicts, he explained, and it solved the problem of coyotes taking the hens. “Everyone’s afraid of the pigs,” he said.

When we visited in November, Rickard had already sent most of the hogs to market and had moved the rest to a hoophouse where they lived in deep bedding until it was their turn to go. Part Berkshire and part Duroc, they made a lot of meat. “We have 17 freezers full, and sell mostly by the pound,” Rickard said.



*Hogs and pigs seem to enjoy each other's company.*

Fortunately in their new digs the pigs still got to enjoy the company of the egg hens. Rickard had moved the hen house -- a large building on wheels painted festively by Kenyon College students -- next to the hoophouse holding the hogs.



*Free-range laying hens get their own house, festively painted by interns from Kenyon College.*

Inside the hen house are rows of nest boxes filled with straw, where several hens brooded over their eggs. The house also holds rows of perches for the hens to roost at night. Birds of several breeds and colors – Barred Rock, Americana, Australorp -- walked the woody area all around the house, pecking the ground for seeds and bugs.

In the summer Rickard gets a steady 10 dozen eggs a day from these hens. The farm delivers 70 to 80 dozen eggs per week, selling most through farmers markets and restaurants.

But the core of the farm are its sheep and cattle pastures. A series of large pastures separated by fencing forms a large ring looping around the farm house. Sheep and cattle graze together on pasture, the sheep eating the higher softer grass, the cows grazing the rougher grass underneath.



*Sheep and cattle graze on pasture in the background. They are rotated through a series of pastures that ring the farm house.*

Rickard uses a form of intensive management called mobstocking. Although each separate pasture is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an acre, the animals are penned into a smaller paddock about 240 feet wide and moved to a new paddock each day. This ensures they eat all the grass in that area before moving on.

The advantage? “Hay is the Number 1 expense for most farms,” Rickard said, “but we won’t need it.”



*The animals spread grass seed across the pasture in their manure.*

By November the grass was looking coarse, and piles of manure were spread across the field. As the grass goes to seed, Rickard explained, the sheep and cattle eat the seeds which are encased in a hard coating and pass through their gut. Then when the animals defecate, the seed is spread around in their manure for the grass to regrow in the spring.

During winter the field will be covered in snow, allowing for compost of the remaining grass and manure together, providing a rich fertilizer for the pasture. In this way, the pasture gains in nutrients every year, supporting a rich biota of soil life.

“Tons of carbon is sequestered,” Rickard said. “This kind of grazing will sequester more carbon than a forest.”

Rickard sees his relationship with the HSUS as an alliance. “I may have an argument with the vegan wing of HSUS, but we have shared objectives even if we are going in different directions. I’m okay with that.”