

LIVESTOCK ON DEMAND

# Animal rights agenda hits home

## New stakeholders force change for farmers

Like it or not PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) is not going away.

In fact, Whole Foods Market, the largest retailer of natural and organic foods with \$5.6 billion in sales last year, recognizes the animal rights group as a stakeholder in the company. And, yes, Whole Foods makes a big chunk of its money selling meat, milk and eggs

"You will not remove them from farming, you will not stop them from talking," said Whole Foods' Andrew Gunther, who develops sources for animal products that meet the store's welfare standards.

Gunther, who himself raises livestock, said farmers must also recognize animal rights groups as part of the conversation on livestock production.

"They are now a stakeholder in your business. You didn't want them. You didn't invite them in. And they're worse than the IRS," he said.

What makes these groups stakeholders? Simply put, they are forcing change.

They certainly grabbed the attention of Whole Foods, which is among numerous companies to have abandoned eggs from caged hens after public outcry from animal activ-

### OFBF HOLDS LIVESTOCK CONFERENCE

Approximately 100 Farm Bureau members recently traveled to Northwest Ohio for OFBF's special issues conference "Animal Agriculture: Today and Tomorrow." The meeting brought farmers together with livestock policy experts from across the country. Discussions focused on the impact of the animal rights and animal welfare movements as well as challenges livestock farmers face in communicating with consumers.

"Some of you feel like you have a target on your back," said OFBF President Bob Peterson before warning the group that much of what the experts had to say would be unnerving.

OFBF Executive Vice President Jack Fisher told the producers to keep animal welfare issues in mind as they return to their farms.

"Don't get mad," he said. "Act."



Photo by Dan Toland

ists. While less accommodating food businesses continue to be hammered by animal rights groups, Gunther's company was recognized by PETA as "Best Animal Friendly Retailer." It's a dubious honor at best, but certainly preferred to graphic photos showing up in Web sites and newspaper ads next to the company name.

But that approach may only offer temporary relief from groups whose goal is to abolish animal agriculture, according to Steve Kopperud, senior vice president of the consulting firm Policy Directions Inc.

"There is no short-term solution to keep these folks away," he said.

While Kopperud agrees that animal rights groups have gained a voice, he said farmers must win back

the trust of not only consumers, but of food retailers.

"As the public moved away from farming and ranching, so did the executives running these companies," he said.

It is more than a soft spot for animals, however, that drives the decisions of food executives. According to Kopperud, guarding the company's brand reputation is their top priority. Often, they find it better to meet activists' demands than wage a public relations battle.

"What have you done? Short-term relief from activist pressure; you protected the brand," Kopperud said. On the other hand, "You have given credibility to the critics."

And ultimately, those demands

force changes on the farm. This leaves farmers with a couple of choices: meet activists demands, and live to farm another day — or wage their own public relations battle to win back the minds of consumers. If retailers can comfortably justify their purchasing decisions and consumers are informed rather than alarmed, then the activists have lost their power.

Kopperud argues that farmers must be the ones to carry the message of animal welfare.

"It's a lot more difficult to shoot at a farmer, than it is to shoot at a corporation," he said.

**Part 2 of this series will examine the roles of science and emotion as farmers attempt to answer difficult questions about animal welfare.**

### ON YOUR BEHALF Public Policy

Here are some of the activities in which the Public Policy staff recently worked on behalf of OFBF members:

- Represented OFBF and Natural Resource Conservation Service State Technical Committee at the Western Lake Erie Basin Partnership meeting in Toledo.
- Prepared written comments and presented oral testimony at Ohio Environmental Protection Agency Air Quality rules hearing.
- Represented OFBF at the National Council of Agricultural Employers summer board meeting with significant discussion on immigration issues.
- Worked with members to develop testimony that was presented at the Ohio EPA's public hearings for draft wastewater discharger permits for the Marion and Fostoria ethanol plants.
- Served on a panel to discuss how livestock issues could impact Ohio's soybean industry at the Ohio Soybean Council's 2020 strategic planning and vision meeting.
- Responded to issues and concerns of a Farm Bureau member in Clark County regarding the National Animal Identification System (NAIS).
- Met with Rep. Steve Reinhard to discuss drainage issues.
- Took part in the Water Management Association of Ohio fall conference planning committee and Western Lake Erie Basin Research and Data committee.
- Met with Ohio Department of Agriculture representatives to discuss its National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit delegation package submitted to U.S. EPA.
- Spoke on "Large Livestock Issues" at the Hancock County annual meeting.
- Represented OFBF on a National Council of Agricultural Employers H-2A Committee conference call.
- Attended the Nursery Growers of Lake County Ohio Summer field day.
- Met with the new director of ODNR Division of Forestry to discuss priority issues.
- Met with representatives of ODNR Divisions of Forestry, Soil & Water Conservation District and Ohio Forestry Association to discuss the master logger program and handling of ag pollution abatement complaints involving silviculture.
- Provided animal care information and resources to a Tuscarawas County Farm Bureau leader who will be working with the county's humane officer to educate them about production animal agriculture.



Photo by Darren Frank

### Wash Out

A barn in Wyandot County is surrounded by water after heavy rains hammered north-west Ohio in August. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) declared a major disaster area for Allen, Crawford, Hancock, Putnam, Richland, and Wyandot Counties making them eligible for federal aid.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, said he plans to work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to ensure local farms also receive needed federal assistance.

## Change to immigration rule starts this month

Comprehensive immigration reform died a hard death in Congress this summer. But that doesn't mean immigration changes aren't on the way.

Starting this month, there will be changes for employers who receive a "no-match" letter from the Social Security Administration (SSA) or Department of Homeland Security (DHS). A no-match letter means that certain employees' names and Social Security numbers found on W-2 forms do not match SSA's or DHS's records.

Receiving the letter means that a business has "constructive knowledge" of employing an unauthorized alien. According to a rule published by DHS, constructive knowledge is "knowledge that may fairly be inferred through notion of certain facts and circumstances that would lead a person, through the exercise of reasonable care, to know about a certain condition."

Previously under a 1986 law, employers had to ask job applicants to provide documents that they were legally authorized to work in the United States. Sometimes those documents were false.

Now under the new rule, a business has 90 days after receiving a no-match letter to resolve the discrepancy or fire the worker. Refusing to respond appropriately and in a timely manner could result in a large fine, said John Wargowsky, Ohio Farm Bureau's senior director of field communications. Previously, businesses were not liable if the docu-

ments appeared to be genuine and related to the person presenting them.

One concern is that the rule does not seem to provide much protection for employers from lawsuits after they fire a worker, Wargowsky said.

### 'NO-MATCH LETTER' GUIDELINES

Once you receive a "no-match" letter, you need to follow these steps to gain safe harbor from constructive knowledge of employing an illegal alien:

Within 30 days of receiving the no-match letter, you need to verify that the mismatch was not a record-keeping error on your part. Inform the relevant agency if an error is discovered.

Within 90 days of getting the letter, you need to continue to attempt to resolve the issue and inform the relevant agency. You should ask the employee to confirm the accuracy of employment records and/or ask the employee to resolve the issue with SSA.

Days 91-93 after getting the letter. If the issue is not resolved, you need to complete a new I-9 form as if it was a new employee except don't use documents or receipts containing the Social Security number or alien number in question. Identity documents must contain a photo.

## In-season deer damage permits being eliminated

If deer are a problem on your property, you need to be aware of a recent change by the Ohio Department of Natural Resource's Ohio Division of Wildlife. The division is eliminating in-season deer damage permits.

The decision was made because a review of deer harvest records showed "use of these permits has not had an appreciable impact on reducing the local deer population and discouraged landowners from addressing the problem at the time the problem was occurring," according to a letter sent to property owners and signed by David Graham, head of the wildlife division. The letter also said reports of abuse of the program have increased "significantly" over the past three years.

Previously during deer-gun season, property owners could obtain extra permits, which sometimes were distributed to hunters willing to harvest antlerless deer on their property. While these permits will no longer be issued, farmers can still get deer damage control permits after county wildlife officials inspect the crop damage.

The wildlife division pointed out in the letter that it was committed to reducing the deer population and has added more deer-gun days for hunters, reduced the cost of antlerless deer permits and increased the bag limit for bow hunters who used these permits in October and November. The agency encouraged farmers to require hunters on their property to take antlerless deer before harvesting a buck.

The growing deer population is a major concern for farmers, and Ohio Farm Bureau has called on state officials to cut the deer population in half to 250,000. OFBF, however, does not oppose the elimination of the in-season deer damage permits, said Rocky Black, Ohio Farm Bureau's senior director of policy and political affairs.

"We recognize the need to manage the deer season, and we're cooperating with the department," Black said.