



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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I told some good friends that I was going to dedicate this week's edition to persistent salesmen who do combine jumping to further their cause, and I invite you to let me know their thoughts on that, and I will display those next week. I will instead touch on something that I have been studying for several weeks, so will utilize my efforts towards that end.

I received a lot of comments on the invitation of animal rights groups to USMARC a couple of weeks ago including the actions outside of the Center. I talked to one rancher in particular who witnessed a helicopter flying over his operation. He was just one of several who were disgusted by the actions of these groups endangering their animals and their livelihoods and particularly their input to our research center. There is a constant activism when it comes to these groups who want us to completely get away from raising, eating meat or even using animal byproducts. They are constantly looking for new ways to extend and expand their agendas including even going into our churches. Let's look at this effort this week!

Maybe you didn't know that, and usually when I tell people what trends we're seeing in animal rights activism, this one usually make their eyes widen. Did you know that animal rights activist groups have been working to develop relationships within faith-based communities for years? It's true – both the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) have “faith outreach” programs, and staff dedicated to this audience. While it may seem like an odd pairing, HSUS and PETA see faith-based communities as critical allies in their mission. It is not lost on them that if they can manipulate values and sense of morality to enlist religious leaders to oppose the use of animals by humans, it will make their cause look much more mainstream. Of course, they are beginning with very general statements that most people could support in a document called “Evangelical Statement on Responsible Animal Care.”

The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission helped author a new statement aimed at uniting evangelicals on what the Bible says about care for God's living creatures. Of course these two groups were a major partner in bringing this forward. While denominations like the Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, Baptist Church, United Church of Christ have adopted stances on animal welfare specific to them, there existed no single document focused on responsible animal care for the broad spectrum of Christian believers to affirm. The result of this effort was released this last month under the title “Evangelical Statement on Responsible Animal Care.” Of course all of us in agriculture prescribe to this very thing, but just think about the players behind this? I refer to the fox in the chicken house, but this time the fox is in the House of Faith.

I have to hand it to them, they are smooth and they are smart. They will use anything they can to further their agenda. They are building on Pope Francis' visit to America and his statement on caring for all of God's creations, but now are pulling in the Protestant clergy - <http://www.readthespirit.com/explore/hsus-publishes-every-living-thing-evangelicals-join-pope-francis-in-compassion-for-animals/>. If you are interested in more on this or want to find the book, you can do so at the HSUS website: http://www.humanesociety.org/news/press_releases/2015/09/new-book-faith-animal-welfare.html.

Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States, described the campaign as “This is an exciting and new high-water mark for us in the 10 years since we established a Faith Outreach Program based on the premise that religious values call for kind and merciful treatment of all creatures. The statement affirms that God created humans as distinct from and superior to animals, but when sin entered the world it corrupted relationships not only between humans but also between humankind and animals.” I can tell you that this is part of the “incremental changes” approach to animal rights activism. This is just the proverbial foot in the door and they are being welcomed in with open arms.

Now these animal rights advocates just scored a brand new ally in what may seem like an unlikely place. And no, I'm not talking about former Daily Show host Jon Stewart's announcement that his life's work will now focus on giving sanctuary to abused farm animals (however awesome that may be). I'm talking about North America's leading Jewish sustainability organization, “Hazon.” Earlier this month, HSUS, announced that they would partner with Hazon, which takes its name from a Hebrew word meaning “vision”, to launch a series of programs aimed at furthering farm animal welfare education and advocacy. So now they have enlisted about every major religion – I would assume Islam will be next.

The end game for these animal rights groups is for all of us to go Vegan. Activist groups realize that a simple “go vegan” message does not resonate with the average consumer. To achieve their goal, they instead “scale back” their demands – rather than pushing people to abandon eating meat altogether, animal rights activist groups portray themselves as focused on animal welfare and advocate for changes that they deem to be “more humane” in how meat and poultry are produced. Of course, their real intent is to make livestock production increasingly more difficult and expensive. These groups will continue to move the goal post of what they consider to be acceptable until animal agriculture is no longer sustainable.

Seeing these organizations attempting and now succeeding to enlist faith-based organizations in their mission should be alarming to all of us involved in animal agriculture. I encourage you to remember your local churches and religious organizations when offering farm tours or connecting your community with information about animal agriculture. The more we can expose people to factual, positive information about our industry, the more we can inoculate consumers against the myths and misinformation routinely disseminated by animal activist organizations – even through our Churches!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or UNL Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, UNL Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>