

Animal welfare legislation passes House

By ALEX DOTY
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IONIA - Recently approved legislation in the Michigan House of Representatives aims to increase certain animal welfare standards in the state's agriculture industry, and local industry experts say they know what is best for their animals.

Kevin Gould, who is in the agriculture industry and is also an educator at the Michigan State University Extension, said animals that aren't treated well usually don't produce well, and the ultimate goal for the agriculture industry is to be as productive and profitable as possible.

"Farmers, for the most part, do a good job caring about the animals and care about animal welfare," he said.

Gould said much of what is done in the farming industry is based on science, and those scientific standards have taught the farming industry the best way to raise and care for livestock and other farm animals.

Gould wasn't the only local person in the agriculture industry who knows how improper treatment of farm animals can affect business.

"We know how to take care of the animals," said local resident Raymond Krieger, who is in the industry. "If we don't, you know what happens."

Like Gould, he said animals are more productive and profitable if they are treated humanely, and less productive if they aren't.

Recently passing by an 87 to 20 vote in the House, the bill would ban farmers and operators from confining egg laying hens, pregnant pigs or veal calves in a way that prevents them from lying down, standing up, fully extending their limbs or turning around fully during the day.

According to the legislation, the rules would apply to veal calves one year after the bill's effective date, and the portion governing care of pregnant pigs and laying hens 10 years after the bill's effective date.



Cows roam free at Amanda and Douglas Powell's farm, not confined to small cages. Legislation recently passed the state House of Representatives that would ban farmers and operators from confining egg laying hens, pregnant pigs or veal calves in a way that prevents them from lying down, standing up, fully extending their limbs or turning around fully during the day. Sentinel-Standard/ALEX DOTY

"Ten years means there's a lot of time for farmers to be prepared," Rep. Mike Huckleberry, D-Greenville, said.

For local legislators, the thought was that this bill was something that would be a benefit to farmers in the long run as opposed to other action.

"What I think is that all farmers benefit, large and small," said Huckleberry, who voted for the legislation.

Had a legislative proposal not been worked on, it would have been likely that the Humane Society of the United States would have crafted a ballot initiative which could have added stricter regulations to the industry, "In the long run, we think this will be a whole lot better than someone else telling them what to do," Huckleberry said.

Rep. Brian Calley, R-Portland, who also voted for the measure, saw the likelihood of a ballot initiative coming from the humane society as being a big possibility - especially considering their actions in other states.

"I think it's a near certainty that there would have been a ballot initiative that would have put (farmers) out of business," he said.

He said there was preliminary polling done by the humane society, and the measure polled 2-to-1 in their favor, and when looking at how similar the scenario was to a recent one in California, the bargaining position for state officials was poor.

According to Calley, he feels this is why the legislation and a compromise was reached in order to prevent the ballot initiative.

"The Humane Society of the United States is one of the largest, richest and most powerful organizations in the country," he said. "They can shove a ballot initiative down your throat like they did in California."

*Sept. 18, 2009
The Ionia Sentinel-Standard*