

Letters to the Editor

Veterinarians should stand against legislation that protects animal abusers in agriculture industry

We are writing in response to the recent letter to the editor by Judith LaBounty,¹ in which she expressed her disappointment that Iowa had passed House File 589, a law designed to allow state officials to pursue criminal charges against individuals who seek jobs with agricultural facilities through deception or false statements so that they can take videos of the conditions and handling of the animals at those facilities. We support her sentiments.

Over the past 3 years, we have reviewed at least 20 undercover videos taken at a variety of farms, dairies, hatcheries, and slaughter facilities, and unfortunately, each and every one displayed what we consider to be an internal industry culture of appalling animal cruelty coupled with intense animal suffering. As much as the industry would like to believe that these are shocking aberrations, we suggest that they are not. There are too many, and unfortunately, they keep coming.

In our opinion, the animal agriculture industry has an animal welfare problem. With 95% of the American public in a survey² from Oklahoma State University agreeing with the statement, "It is important to me that animals on farms are well cared for," the industry also has a consumer problem when undercover videos show a much different reality. Undercover videotapes have led to convictions for animal abuse, animal protection legislation, and national media attention and have caused some large national businesses to distance themselves from certain producers. In an industry that is self-regulated, such videos may provide an impetus for much-needed welfare reform. Bills preventing videotaping of farm facilities and conditions only allow the current situation to be perpetuated. Importantly, for farmers who take their animal welfare responsibilities seriously, these bills make every producer suspect in the eyes of the consumer, which is not fair.

We agree with Ms. LaBounty that veterinarians have a duty to act

as advocates for animals. We also believe that veterinarians should stand united against this type of legislation.

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1. LaBounty J. Duty to act as advocates for animals (lett). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2012;241:41-42.
2. Norwood FB, Lusk JL, Prickett RW. *Consumer preferences for farm animal welfare: results of a nationwide telephone survey*. Stillwater, Okla: Oklahoma State University Department of Agricultural Economics, 2007.

Foot-and-mouth disease too dangerous to study on mainland

Regarding the news article "Flaws seen in risk analysis of Kansas disease center,"¹ which was published in the August 15, 2012, issue of *JAVMA*, there is no doubt that the foot-and-mouth disease virus (FMDV) is currently the most contagious and most economically important virus for food animals in the United States. Only a few FMDV particles are required to infect a susceptible animal. According to the article, a National Research Council review from 2010 noted that a Department of Homeland Security risk assessment indicated that the risk of infection resulting from release of FMDV from the proposed National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility approached 70% over a period of 50 years, whereas an updated risk assessment from Homeland Security indicated that there was less than a 0.11% chance

of accidental release of viable FMDV over the facility's estimated 50-year lifespan. It seems reasonable to me that the true risk of an accidental release of FMDV from the proposed Kansas facility is somewhere in between.

I suspect that an accidental release of FMDV in Manhattan, Kan, would likely result in most of the more than 100 million susceptible animals in the eastern United States becoming infected. Such an epizootic would cost billions of dollars, result in a loss of invaluable long-established genetic lines, and cause severe emotional distress among those involved in animal husbandry.

Approximately 30 years ago, FMDV escaped from the Plum Island Animal Disease Center, the facility that currently houses FMDV testing and research facilities. Although sentinel animals housed in open pens on the island became infected, no animals off the island did.

As a virologist, I see no reason to take any risk with FMDV. While I support building the research facility in Manhattan, Kan, I suggest that it be used to study other dangerous animal viruses and that research on FMDV continue to be restricted to Plum Island. Cost is not an issue when one considers the devastation that would follow an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United States.

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1. Cima G. Flaws seen in risk analysis of Kansas disease center. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2012;241:409.

Instructions for Writing a Letter to the Editor

Readers are invited to submit letters to the editor. Letters may not exceed 500 words and 6 references. Letters to the Editor must be original and cannot have been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Not all letters are published; all letters accepted for publication are subject to editing. Those pertaining to anything published in the *JAVMA* should be received within one month of the date of publication. Submission via e-mail (JournalLetters@avma.org) or fax (847-925-9329) is encouraged; authors should give their full contact information, including address, daytime telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address.

Letters containing defamatory, libelous, or malicious statements will not be published, nor will letters representing attacks on or attempts to demean veterinary societies or their committees or agencies. Viewpoints expressed in published letters are those of the letter writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions or policies of the AVMA.