

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC
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viewpoints.azcentral.com

Viewpoints

A SUNLESS HELL

Confronting the cruel facts
of factory-farmed meat

By Matthew Swadlow
SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

Arizona voters will be asked this fall to weigh in on a ballot measure called the Humane Treatment of Farm Animals Act, which is now in the signature gathering stage here. By November, it is certain to be one of our liveliest election-year debates. The measure, modeled on a vote that passed by Florida voters, would prohibit the factory farming practices of confining pigs andveal calves in crates so small that the animals cannot even turn around or extend their heads.

Factory farming, in general, is no one's favorite subject, and the details

here are particularly unpleasant to think about: masses of creatures enduring lives of unrelieved confinement and deprivation. But if you're in need of reasons to sign the petition and vote for the initiative, they are easy to find, and our discussion with the subject is a good place to start. Known in the trade as "intensive confinement" or "mass confinement," it sounds pretty rough. And as we're meeting already, pork producers and the PFC team in here like to not take well to criticism of what they regard as "standard practice."

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ILLUSTRATION BY MATTIOLI
REPUBLIC

Arizonans can take stand against practices of factory farming

FACTORY FARMING Continued from V1

Just this month, the industry's allies in the Arizona Legislature proposed a constitutional amendment to the public from passing any laws promoting the humane treatment of farm animals, effective Jan. 1, 2006. Nice to have a fallback position: Even if the humane-farming initiative passes by vote of the people, as industry lobbyists apparently fear it will, they plan to nullify the law retroactively.

Basically, pork producers figured out some years ago that if they packed the maximum number of pigs into the minimum amount of space, if they pinned the creatures down into



Matthew
Scully
SPECIAL FOR
THE PUBLIC

fit-to-size iron crates above slatted floors and carved out giant "lagoons" to confine the creature — the future — if they turned the "farm," in short, into a sunless hell of metal and concrete. It made everything so much more efficient. An obvious cost-saver, and from the industry's standpoint, that should settle the matter.

Veal, by definition, is the product of a sick, anemic, deliberately malnourished calf, a newborn dragged away from his mother in the first hours of life. Veal calves are dealt the harshest of punishments for the least essential of meats. And if you think people can get too sentimental about animals, try listening sometime to chefs and gourmards going on about the "velvety smooth succulence" of their favorite fare.

"Cost-saver" in industrial livestock agriculture may usually be taken to mean "moral shortcut." For all of its "science-based" pretensions, factory farming is really just an elaborate, endless series of evasions from the most elementary duties of honest animal husbandry. Man, the rationalizing creature, can justify just about anything when there is money in sight. It's only easier when your victims are so

completely out of sight and unable to speak for themselves.

Over the years, one miserly deprivation led to another, ever harsher methods were applied to force costs lower and lower, and so on until the animals ceased to be understood as living creatures at all. Pigs, for example, aren't even "raised" anymore, a term that once conveyed some human attention and care. These days, in America's 395,000 kills-per-day pork industry, pigs are "grown," crowded together by the hundreds in the automated, scientifically based intensive-confinement facilities formerly known as barns.

Unlike the old ways

To the factory farmer, in contrast to the traditional farmer with his sense of honor and obligation, the animals are "production units," and accorded all the sympathy that term suggests. As conservative commentator the late, but not forgotten, in the *Wall Street Journal*, "On the old family farms, pigs and cattle and chickens were raised for food, but they were free for a time; they mated, raised piglets, calves and chicks and were protected by the farmers. They had a life. On industrial farms, they don't."

Among the more disreputable claims made to justify intensive confinement is that it's actually for the benefit of the pigs. They "prefer" confinement to grazing outdoors. They need "protection" from each other's aggression.

If you know absolutely nothing about pigs, this has a vaguely comforting ring to it — that is, until the moment you get into a factory farm, as I have had occasion to do. Inside, it becomes dramatically obvious that their ceaseless, merciless confinement is the cause of the pigs' aggression, and by no stretch a protective measure.

It turns out that when you trap and shove 400 to 500 piglets, mammals in gestation crates 22 inches wide and 7 feet long, when their limbs are broken from trying to turn or escape and they are covered in sores, blood, tumors, "pus pockets," and their own urine and excrement, they tend to act up a bit.

Indeed, the most notable thing is how the appearance of

any human being causes a violent panic. A mere opening of the door brings on a horrific wave of roars, squeals and cage-rattling from the sows. Another memorable sight is the "cull pen," wherein each and every day, the dead or dying bodies of the weak are placed, the ones who expired from the sheer, unrelenting agony of it.

It takes a well-practiced dishonesty to insist with a straight face that intensive confinement is "for their own good," and almost as brazen is the libertarian case for factory farming, which may be summed up as "mind your own business." Along with that comes a haughty little reminder that we're all the beneficiaries of factory farming, and where do you think all that cheap meat just comes from, and why don't we just be grateful and let them manage their own affairs?

The argument has a certain practical appeal, provided you forget that factory farming is propped up by tens of billions of dollars in annual federal subsidies, which are very definitely into a state of complete brokenness. And anyone who inflicted such tortures on that animal, no matter what excuses might be offered, would be guilty of a felony. If the creatures are comparable, and the conditions identical, and the suffering equal, how can the one be "standard practice" and the other a crime?

Next, in an interview with *Arizona Capitol Times*, Klinker tried out the "sentimentalist" line. The initiative, he scoffed, is based on "pure emotions" — as opposed to factory farming itself, which we are to assume is guided at every grim stage by the light of pure reason.

He followed up with a little warning that the Humane Treatment of Farm Animals Act is all the doing of "outsiders" anyway, by which he means various cranks, subversives, and social misfits who apparently are conspiring at this very moment to "impose the values of a vegetarian society on all Arizonans."

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mane-farming initiative, started things off with a blunt reminder that farm animals aren't pets, and so our sympathy for them is misplaced. "These people," Klinker told *TheSun Weekly*, "want these animals raised the same way we raise our dogs and cats. I think most people understand that's not how food is produced."

When you want people to harden their hearts, however, it's probably not such a good idea to invite comparisons between farm animals and dogs or cats. How would your dog react if you stuffed her into a crate in which she could not even stretch or turn around, and never let her out? No human attention or companionship with other animals. No bedding, straw to lie on. No single moment outdoors, ever, to feel the breeze or the warmth of the sun.

What if it were a dog?

Your dog, a being of intelligence and emotional capacities entirely comparable to those of a pig, would beg and wail and whimper and finally fall silent into a state of complete brokenness. And anyone who inflicted such tortures on that animal, no matter what excuses might be offered, would be guilty of a felony. If the creatures are comparable, and the conditions identical, and the suffering equal, how can the one be "standard practice" and the other a crime?

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needs to hear from a broader range of outside opinion. And it may surprise him to learn that the problems of factory farming are becoming more apparent, and more abhorrent, to people of every political stripe.

When the conservative columnist George Will, for example, calls cruelty to animals "an intrinsic evil," citing the "pain-inflicting confinements and mutilations" of factory farming, you know it can no longer be shrugged off as the concern of a faint-hearted few.

Factory farming, Mr. Will observed in *Newsweek* not long ago, has become a "serious issue of public policy." And conservatives in particular, applying that uncompromising moral clarity on which they pride themselves, should not be afraid to call "vicious" things what they are.

Another conservative writer, Andrew Ferguson of *Bloomberg News*, challenged the "hyper-efficient agricultural economy" and "the cruel innovations the modern industrial farm depends upon." And Father Richard John Neuhaus, writing in the conservative *National Review*, expressed his disgust at "the horrors perpetrated against pigs on industrial farms," a matter "that warrants public and governmental attention."

Neuhaus could cite, if he needed further authority, Pope Benedict XVI, who has warned against the "degrading of living creatures to a commodity" entailed in factory farming. And Protestant Christians could hear a similar message from one of their own most respected figures, Charles Colson, the conservative evangelist who cautions that "When it comes to animal welfare today, Christians have allowed the secular world to set the agenda. ... We need to get involved in shaping laws that determine animal treatment. But first we must make it our business to find out how the cattle of the earth are treated on factory farms." Christians especially, declared Colson, "have a duty to prevent the needless torment of animals."

"Outsiders" of all of them, but not to my knowledge collaborators in any effort to impose "the

values of a vegetarian society" on Arizona. For Klinker and other lobbyists for factory farming, surely the lesson is that they should spend a little less time warning about other people's values, and a little more time examining their own.

It is true, as he reminds us, that other states have far larger "herds" than in Arizona's \$40 million-a-year pork industry. But this is hardly a thought to put one's mind at rest. The same was also true, until recently, of Utah, now home to a sprawling network of nightmarish "mega-farms," all of them built and run by giant corporations like Smithfield Foods, the real outsiders in all of this. The largest of these places, a sort of garage for pigs, holds 1.3 million in confinement and produces more waste every year than metropolitan Los Angeles.

Why, Klinker wonders, enact a law here instead of in Iowa, North Carolina or Utah? Well, for starters, maybe Arizonans do not want to go the way of Utah. And in that case, now would be a good time to bar the door.

Prepare yourself to hear, in the coming months, these arguments and similar rubbish from industry lobbyists, their shell veterinarians, and anyone else that you can trot out to make something pernicious and contemptible seem decent and praiseworthy. Then in the quiet of the voting booth ask yourself why any creature of God, however humble, should be made to endure the dark, lonely, tortured existence of the factory farm, and what kind of people build their fortunes upon such misery.

The answer will send an unequivocal message, to factory farmers here and to all concerned, that unbridled arrogance, bad faith, and rank cruelty are not Arizona values.

Matthew Scully worked for Arizona governors Meacham, Mofford, and Symington. A former special assistant and deputy director of speechwriting for President Bush, he is the author of "Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy."