

Farm Takeover Bill (Egg Products Inspection Act)

IMPORTANCE: Producers recognize their moral obligation to provide for the well-being of their animals and to raise them in a humane and compassionate manner. Passing one-size-fits-all legislation will actually take away producers' freedom to operate in a way that is best for their animals. More importantly, it will ultimately limit consumer choices and increase food costs for American families. Such legislation will set a dangerous precedent and will encourage other special interest groups that wish to influence animal production practices without scientific basis. The result will be higher production costs, job losses, fewer consumer choices and higher consumer food prices – and potential setbacks to animal welfare.

BACKGROUND: H.R. 3798, the “Egg Products Inspection Act Amendments of 2012,” introduced Jan. 23, 2012, seeks to write into federal law an agreement between an association of egg producers and the animal rights group Humane Society of the United States. The agreement requires the egg industry over time to nearly double the size of the cages it uses for hens, from the current standard of 64 square inches to 124 square inches. The cost estimate for that change alone is \$4 billion to \$10 billion. In addition, the bill dictates egg labeling requirements and new air-quality standards for hen houses and prohibits the transport and sale of eggs and egg products that do not meet all requirements. In return, HSUS agreed to forgo seeking state ballot initiatives mandating cage dimensions and to stop lawsuits and undercover investigations of the egg industry.

NPPC POSITION: Pork producers oppose H.R. 3798, as well as amendments to other legislation that accomplish the same goal – a mandate for specific housing sizes and production practices for farm animals. The pork industry opposes legislation that would mandate on-farm food-animal production practices, including banning the use of individual sow housing, because scientific research has shown that there is no one, single best way to house sows. To mandate any one type of sow housing system is not in the best interest of the pigs. The pork industry cannot accept non-science-based directives about production practices that are advocated by animal-rights activists that do not know pork production and have a vegetarian-based agenda masked as a concern for animal welfare.

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Farm Takeover (Egg) Bill Talking Points

- Animal welfare already is a part of the traditional culture of American farming, and farmers recognize their moral obligation to provide healthy, humane environments. They do so by applying modern techniques and training to keep animals healthy and to provide safe, affordable food for American families.
- The legislation will mandate production practices that do not improve the well-being of the animals and are more expensive than currently accepted practices. Increasing consumer food costs during this economic downturn, without improving food safety or quality, is not in the consumers' best interest.
- More than 90 percent of all U.S. farms are owned by individuals, families or family corporations. This legislative mandate will add additional financial burdens on these family-owned small businesses.
- One-size-fits-all legislation will negatively affect small, niche producers who currently receive premiums for their more expensive production practices by reducing their opportunity to differentiate their product.
- The legislative mandate will add bureaucracy and consume precious taxpayer dollars and is not necessary. Egg producers and HSUS could take advantage of USDA's Process Verified Program, which is a fee-for-service program, to provide the assurances they say are important to consumers.
- Legislation that mandates one production type, down to the detail of cage size specifications, will limit scientific research and industry innovation that could ultimately benefit animals. Mandates are a clear disincentive to continuous improvement within agricultural animal care.
- Over the past decade, commodity groups have developed animal care standards based on science. Many of these animal care programs are audited/assessed by trained third-party assessors. Unlike legislative mandates, these standards can be modified and improved as new scientific information is developed.
- The World Association for Animal Health (OIE) is developing international standards for animal care. During the process, which is guided by scientists with industry input, they have moved away from prescriptive housing requirements and adopted outcomes based requirements instead. The proposed legislation is not based on outcomes but rather on cage construction and size requirements.
- The head of the European Egg Processors' Association said recently that a 2010 cage regulation in Germany has reduced production 20 percent. The story is similar in the United Kingdom, where housing requirements have increased operating costs by 8 percent.
- A recent *Guardian News* article warned of looming shortages in Great Britain supermarkets of eggs and products that contain eggs because farms have been forced to close over the EU regulation on hen housing.

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