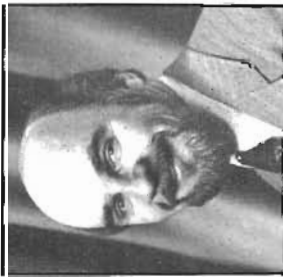


# ANIMAL RIGHTS PEOPLE

by Pat Jackson



Pat Jackson

**C**onsidering Americans' love of meat, it's legitimate to ask, as some cattlemen have, whether the animal rights movement is really a threat to American agriculture.

Animal rights is not a single subject, nor is it a simple issue. It brings together several concerns, all held by people of very firm beliefs. These beliefs include everything from vegetarianism to fear of chemicals in the food supply to the view that feed grains should be used for hungry people around the world, not animals.

The issue has the potential to pull together a lot of support. Some portion about everyone, particularly the mil-

lions of animal lovers. Folks with no sympathy for vegetarianism might join the movement out of their concern over food chemicals. True, the movement would then consist of "strange bedfellows." But nearly every movement or coalition does.

One problem with the issue is that agriculture has a poor track record of sticking together. Think about the current farm bill. We're an independent bunch. And within animal agriculture

are many competing segments: beef, pork, veal, chicken, turkey, lamb. Can we work together against a common challenger?

Animal rights groups are getting better organized. They've been conducting a series of test actions all over the country. These actions include picketing, marches and rallies.

They have potential leadership that could, if it jells, make the movement a potent public voice. Several movie stars and celebrities loudly embrace the cause, from Bridgette Bardot to Bob Barker. One long established animal rights organization has an endowment of \$40 million.

Animal rights has all the earmarks of a dangerous issue. Does this mean cattlemen will be attacked and probably damaged? No it doesn't. Cattlemen aren't as vulnerable as veal and poultry producers. But think a minute about the criticism already leveled at cattle raising and handling; transportation, antibiotics and other chemicals.

Cattlemen don't have to sit by and watch. Our studies for the Farm Animal Welfare Coalition suggest it will be important to do several things to blunt the impact of the movement.

First, we need to get our words straight. Issues are often decided by the language each side uses. Our side is *animal welfare*. Theirs is *animal rights*. We care about the welfare of animals. They believe animals have

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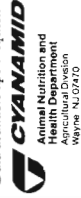


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take protective steps now. If push comes to shove, it's doubtful most people will choose animal rights. But in an extended public struggle, two damaging things could happen. First, several costly problems could be caused through boycotts, consumer action, lawsuits and legislation. Second, if even 5-15% of the public decided to reduce or end red meat consumption, that would have a tremendous impact on the industry.

It's not time for public action, yet. But we must be prepared. Animal agriculture is far stronger if it presents a united front. We must continue working together. The logical vehicle is the Farm Animal Welfare Coalition, which has been active with the issue for three years. NCA is a founding member of the organization.

People are willing to believe the worst about large industries. Critics have an advantage, especially when there is no visible personal gain for them in the issue. They can credibly claim to care only about the public interest. In the case of animal rights, this is true. Their vision of the public interest may differ from yours and mine, but they have the right to state their case.

The only prudent course is to get serious now about fending 'em off. **T**

*Pat Jackson serves as legal counsel for the Farm Animal Welfare Coalition. He practices law in New Hampshire.*

