

# Animal rights: pros and cons

BY CURT HARLER

LANCASTER — 'There's a fox in the henhouse. His name is Dr. Michael Fox, and he doesn't have the welfare of animals at heart'

That's how John Fidler, manager of technical services for Pennfield Corp., summed up the status of the animal rights movement on Monday

Michael Fox is the leading spokesman for the animal rights or animal welfare movement, a group of people which says farm animals are not treated properly

Fox is, by most accounts, a charming and convincing speaker. And he has a number of ordinary as well as powerful people who support his ideas.

The animal rights movement

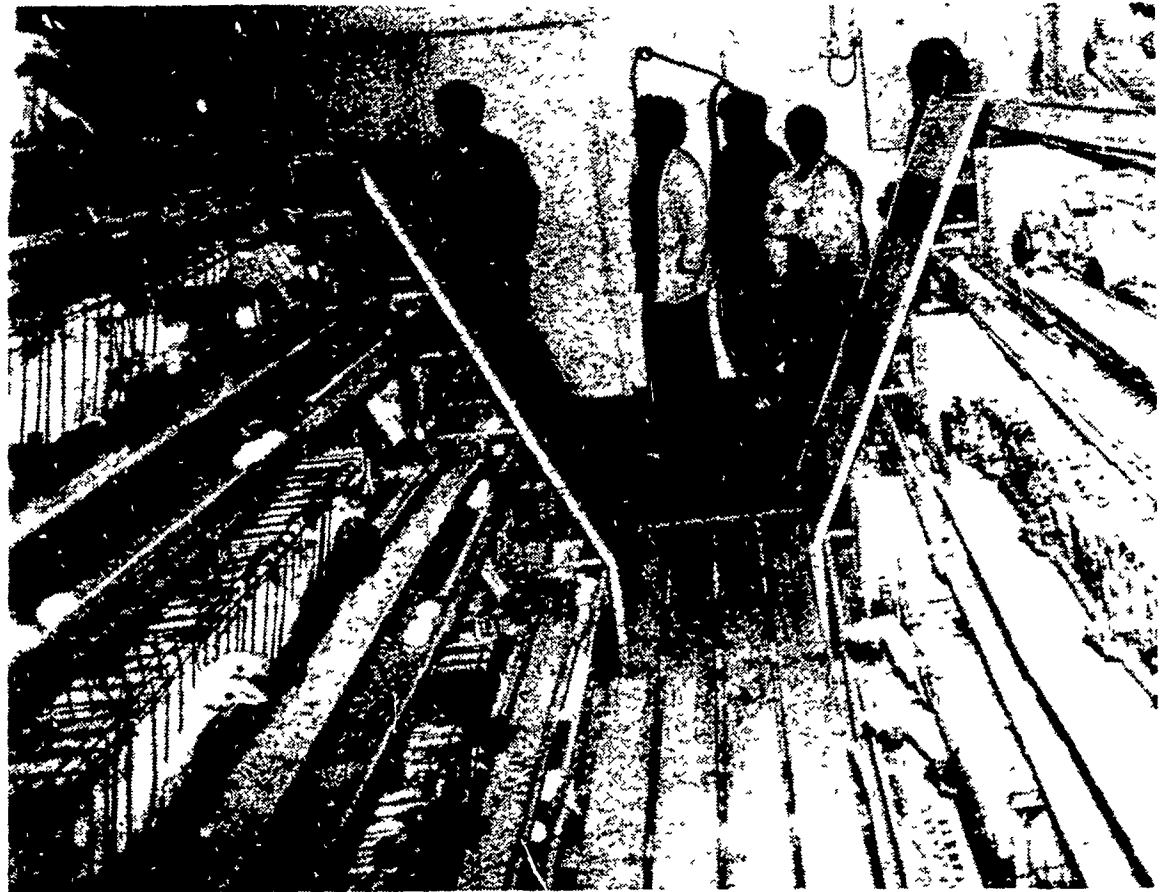
phrase heard in animal rights discussion. It is applied to large confinement operations.

Animal rights people say such farm practices cause livestock mental anguish and undue hardship

Veterinarian Jerry Appelgate dismisses those charges as anthropomorphism, or attributing to an animal human feelings and ideas

Animal rights people want you to think, gee, if I were a laying hen, would I like this?" he told a group of school teachers at a Pennfield-sponsored conference Monday.

The idea is supported by pseudo-intellectuals who are always a



Confinement housing and animal rights were topics of discussion when a group of Lancaster County teachers visited the J. Harold Musser poultry operation. They saw 120,000 layers in two houses, five birds to a cage, at Penn's Peaceful Meadow Farm, R3 Mount Joy. Visitors found the Starcross Leghorns in good shape and laying at profitable rates.

*"...they will not tolerate any type of animal exploitation..."*

basically is a group of humans who are working for better conditions for animals. The humans are deadly serious. They're well-funded and determined to push their cause.

Dennis White of the Humane Association of the United States describes the animal rights movement as divided into two groups, radical and mildly radical.

The radical animal rights activists will not tolerate any type of animal exploitation, experimentation, farming, killing or other areas where animals can benefit man. White told a recent meeting sponsored by the American Farm Bureau Federation.

White says people in that group generally are pure vegetarians. The group is small, he admits, but is highly vocal and has the means and fortitude to bring its views to the general public.

The mildly radical group also says animals have certain rights but recognizes that animals have been used for man's benefit for years.

Most animal welfare advocates would agree that animal rights include freedom of movement to get up, lie down, groom normally and stretch their limbs.

Animal rights activists take exception to modern, large scale farming practices which confine animals and don't allow them to roam on pasture or range.

Factory farming is a key

danger, he said, and by vegetarians.

Dr. Appelgate traced the evolution of agriculture from nomads herding animals to the coming of fences — the first form of confinement.

Economics of scale played a role in further specialization and centralization of agriculture, he continued.

All of this helped farmers make better use of land, labor, and capital, Dr. Appelgate maintains,

*"...animals in Germany are suing their owners..."*

with the result that America has the best quality food in the world at the lowest price.

Is the animal rights movement actually going to throw a monkey wrench into this system?

Some members of the ag community believe it is and note steps in that direction already have been taken.

John Fidler said some animals in Germany are suing their owners with help from animal rights activists.

In Denmark the use of confinement poultry operations was outlawed until the Danes found they could not compete with the rest of the European Economic Community.

At present, Fidler says, Europeans are talking about legislating the rights and welfare of animals.

and even alfalfa hay are not human foodstuffs.

Besides, he says, when competition for a particular grain for food increases its price, feed mills will turn to alternative, less desirable products for animal feed.

What about the charges that animals deserve a degree of freedom? John Skinner of the University of Wisconsin concedes animals in the wild need room to escape predators, find food, and find a mate, but he adds, domesticated animals have all those things provided for them.

One of the best indicators of animal well-being that we have in both wild and confined situations is

production were taken out of the modern laying house.

Dr. Appelgate, too, agrees that supply and demand determine what ag products will be used and how they will be produced.

Generally, government has come to the rescue of oppressed or minority groups. A number of animal rights activists would like to see government step in to help animals, too.

Harry Mussman, administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of USDA says is not unlikely we will see legislation which would require farm animals to be treated kindly.

If that takes place, the APHIS administrator said, it would be an enormous job for the government to make sure animals had what he lists as creature comforts, freedom from pain, and the right not to be deprived of natural conditions.

As administrator of APHIS, I would have great difficulty supporting that kind of thing, if for no other reason but budgetary," he says.

Mussman's alternative to government regulation is self-control.

He says the industry should consider establishing proper guidelines for livestock production and care, and be in a position to defend current production practices.

*"...if I were a laying hen, would I like this..."*

animals eat grain that could best be fed directly to people.

He says such products as crab meal, feather meal, corn gluten,

the reproductive rate,' Skinner says.

'We have to remind people that you don't force production. It is an animal's response to the conditions we provide for it. The animal rewards us for what we give it and responds accordingly,' he concludes.

Fidler would agree with Skinner. Fidler notes that animals in confinement are better fed, are

*"...are they any worse off than house pets kept in cages?..."*

less prone to disease, are sheltered from the weather, and are protected from predators.

Are they any worse off than house pets kept in cages?" Fidler asks.

Fidler leans heavily on the economic argument for confinement housing.

Forty years ago, he points out, it took 12 weeks and 12 pounds of feed to produce a four pound bird for market.

Today that same bird can be produced in seven weeks using just eight pounds feed.

Fidler questions whether the consumer is willing to pay the extra money required to finance animals produced on range.

He said a dozen eggs would cost triple what they do today if egg

Dr. Appelgate, an industry representative, maintains there already are strong incentives to do just that.

An animal under stress won't reproduce, is prone to sickness, and doesn't gain weight as rapidly as one which is treated properly, he would point out.

But the battle may have gone beyond that.

Neal Black, president of the Livestock Conservation Institute, an organization active in promotion of livestock production and disease eradication, says the battle has been taken to our next generation, the little children in school.

Like the Pennfield represen-

(Turn to Page A26)

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