

Ohio Heads to the Polls on Issue 2

By Tracy Taylor Grondine

The Ohio Farm Bureau Federation is urging voters to get to the polls this Election Day and vote “yes” on state ballot “Issue 2,” which would establish an Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board. The success or failure of Issue 2 will likely have tremendous impacts nationwide on how farmers and ranchers are allowed to care for their animals and produce food for the country.

The Issue 2 campaign, [Ohioans for Livestock Care](#), has already received widespread, bipartisan support from Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, the state legislature and congressional members. A long list of endorsements also follows from organizations including the American Humane Association, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food Banks, as well as most of the state’s local Chambers of Commerce.

Issue 2 aims to head off what could potentially be a major firestorm by establishing official guidelines and practices for caring for livestock and a board to oversee them before someone else does.

Earlier this year, when the Humane Society of the United States called the Ohio Farm Bureau to “compromise” on potential animal welfare legislation, OFBF instead went another route. Seeing how compromising with HSUS had worked out in seven other states that now have animal care laws, Ohio instead sought a ballot initiative—and got it.

Ohio Farmer Editor Tim White blogged at the time, “Guess what HSUS? The Ohio Farm Bureau beat you to the punch on this one. And in so doing served notice that Ohio agriculture is not willing to compromise on an issue that you hope will eventually drive consumers to a vegetarian diet and dismantle American agribusiness .”

After all, HSUS successfully won California’s Proposition 2 in November of 2008. And, more recently in Michigan, when HSUS threatened to seek a ballot initiative similar to California’s, pork and poultry producers compromised with the group hoping for the lesser of two evils and got stricter animal care legislation.

But, says the OFBF, Ohio farmers know better than HSUS how to take care of their animals, and they have a lot of experience to back it up. If successful, the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board would be chaired by the Director of the Ohio Agriculture Department with committee members including: three family farmers, two veterinarians, a food safety expert, a local humane society representative, two representatives from statewide farm organizations, the dean of an Ohio agriculture college and two members representing Ohio consumers.

“Issue 2 is about livestock, but it’s also about important choices,” said OFBF Executive Vice President Jack Fisher in an editorial earlier this year. “Should Ohioans or outsiders choose what’s best for Ohio? Should reasoned thought or raw emotion guide important choices? Should we choose what’s best for animals without considering what’s best for people?”

Ohio farmers are optimistic voters will make the right choice this Nov. 3, while farmers nationwide wait and see how Issue 2 will impact their future.