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John Robbins

Author of The New Good Life, Diet For A New America, and many other bestsellers

Posted: July 13, 2010 08:00 AM

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The Brutality of Factory Farms: An Inside Look (VIDEO)

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This past week, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a bill that will essentially prohibit, starting in 2015, any egg from being sold in the state that comes from caged hens.

Recognizing how widespread concern about the humane treatment of farm animals has become, the California Milk Advisory Board has recently ramped up its 10-year "Happy Cow" advertising campaign with a

new series of ads proclaiming that "Great milk comes from Happy Cows. Happy Cows come from California." These ads are now being shown across the nation.

Unfortunately, there are a few problems with the ads. For one, they weren't filmed in California at all. They were filmed in Auckland, New Zealand.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Current Milk Board ads claim that 99 percent of the state's dairy farms are family owned. But in order to arrive at this figure, they count as "dairy farms" rural households with one or two cows.

My concern, let me emphasize, is not with small-scale family farms. I have no problem with the many hard-working families who treat their cows well, take care of the land and try to bring a healthy product to market.

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Thanks to the practices they employ, the amount of milk produced yearly by the average California cow is nearly 3,000 pounds more than the national average. This increased production may seem like a good thing, but it is achieved at great cost to the animals. The cows are routinely confined in extremely unnatural conditions, injected with hormones, fed antibiotics, and in general treated with all the compassion of four legged milk pumps. Roughly one third of California's cows suffer from painful udder infections, and more than half suffer from other infections and illnesses.

Although genetically engineered bovine growth hormone is banned in many countries including Canada, Australia, New Zealand and much of the European Union, it is widely used in California's largest dairy operations to increase milk production. Unfortunately, it also increases udder infections and lameness in the cows, markedly raises the amount of pus found in milk, and [may increase the risk of cancer in consumers](#).

The natural lifespan of a dairy cow is about 25 years, but one-fourth of California's dairy cows are slaughtered each year (typically at four or five years old), because they've become crippled from painful foot infections or calcium depletion, or simply because they can no longer produce the unnaturally high amounts of milk required of them.

The Milk Board ads present the California dairy industry as a bucolic enterprise that operates in lush, grassy pastures. Some of the ads employ the slogan "So much grass, so little time." But California's dairy industry is concentrated in the dry and barren Central Valley. Here, the cows are typically kept in overcrowded, dirt feedlots. Some never see a blade of grass in their entire lives.

The ads show calves in meadows talking happily to their mothers. But the calves born to California dairy cows typically spend only 24 hours with their mothers, and some do not even get that much. [Here is a video](#) that reveals what actually happens to the calves:

The ads propagate the image that California dairy cows live in natural conditions and the practices of the dairy industry are in harmony with the environment. But the amount of excrement produced each year by the dairy cows in the 50-square mile area of California's Chino Basin would make a pile with the dimensions of a football field and as tall as the Empire State Building. When it rains heavily, dairy manure in the Chino Basin is washed straight into the Santa Ana River and some makes its way into the aquifer that supplies half of Orange County's drinking water.

The large-scale factory dairies in California's Central Valley produce more excrement than the entire human population of Texas. About 20 million Californians (65 percent of the state's population) rely on drinking water that is threatened by contamination from nitrates and other poisons stemming from dairy manure. Nitrates have been linked to cancer and birth defects.

The Milk Board defends the ads by saying they are entertaining, and are not intended to be taken seriously. But the Milk Board is not in the entertainment business. It has not spent hundreds of millions of dollars on this ad campaign to amuse the public, but to increase the sales of California dairy products.

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Besides, does misleading the public become legitimate just because it is done in an entertaining way?

The Milk Board knows that showing calves being taken away from their bellowing mothers and confined in tiny veal crates won't sell their product. Neither will showing emaciated, lame animals who have collapsed from a lifetime of hardship and over-milking, being taken to slaughterhouses and having their throats slit. But this is the reality for animals in the large-scale factory farms that produce most of the state's milk. Covering up this misery with fantasy ads of happy cows who are actually in New Zealand is not amusing. It is perpetrating a sham on the public.

This is why I have joined with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) in a [lawsuit](#) that challenges the Milk Board's ads as unlawfully deceptive. Thus far, the Milk Board has prevailed in court, even though it's obvious that the ads lie to the public. Why? Because the California Milk Advisory Board is the marketing arm of the California Department of Agriculture, a government agency. And in California, in a truly Orwellian twist, government agencies are exempt from laws prohibiting false advertising.

Should we hold our advertisers, even if they are government agencies, accountable to reality? Should we require that what they tell us have some resemblance to the truth?

This month, PETA has erected billboards throughout the state that read, "California Cheese Comes From Miserable Cows." PETA, of course, is an animal rights group, but this issue is increasingly being recognized as one that concerns not only vegetarians and animal advocates. Consumers who want the animal products they buy to be from humanely raised animals can be found in every segment of society.

Consideration for the plight of animals is a central part of the American character. It is an essential part of who we are as a people. The "happy cow" ads are an insult to the legitimate humanitarian concerns of millions of people. As consumers, do we want to reward this sort of behavior with our hard-earned dollars?

Abraham Lincoln was speaking not only for vegetarians or for animal rights advocates when he said, "I care not much for a man's religion whose dog or cat are not the better for it."

To learn about steps you can take towards greater physical health, social conscience, and economic freedom, read my latest book [The New Good Life: Living Better Than Ever in an Age of Less](#). For information about my work, and to sign up for my email-list, visit [JohnRobbins.info](#).

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There are books on both sides of the issue, but we would like to see point and counterpoint side by side. We would also like to debunk some myths.



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The rest of us can do something positive and make some personal choices ourselves so that none of the oil companies will be able to claim consumer demand as a reason for misbehaving.



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Marc Bekoff: Who Lives and Who Dies: We All Care About Animals, Right?

Should humans keep other animals in cages, eradicate them for human development, eat or wear them, feed them to one another, or move them from one habitat to another?

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ASPCAXPETAXHSUS OSPCA mass killings <http://tinyurl.com/3a6bk...> (aspcapetahsus) Someone PLEASE tell these groups what the words **ANIMAL RESCUE REALLY MEANS!**
1 minute ago from *API*

FeverPursuit Alright guys and gals. Please take a minute to watch this video. **Animal Rights** groups are pressing very hard for a... <http://fb.me/DIYwIRnM>
7 minutes ago from *Facebook*

exposingthelie3 ,I think THIS is the most RIDICULOUS. It EVEN SOUNDS CRAZY. PETA,an **ANIMAL RIGHTS** GROUP, Killed 2601 DOGS-CATS in ONE YR,HOMED ONLY 8! WTH?
10 minutes ago from *API*

[PETA proposes robotic groundhog for Pa. festival - Yahoo! News](#)
[Inhabitat » Sweden is Burning Biofuel Made from Bunnies](#)
[Small group of animal rights activists protests Vick outside Coliseum, others sh...](#)
[Boycott the Discovery Channel Networks - The Petition Site](#)

Around the Web:

- [Animal rights - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
- [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals \(PETA\): The animal ...](#)
- [The Animal Rights FAQ](#)
- [Animal Rights | Animals Articles & Issues | Change.org](#)
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FirstBeKind 12:44 PM on 7/21/2010

0 Fans

Bravo, John!

Too bad your book--Diet for a New America--is not required reading in our schools. The meat and dairy industry can peddle their wares without question but let anyone who cares about animals try to educate children. Administrators and parents scream bloody murder! How sad!

We are a dispicable species. We treat animals like they are nothing but production units. I find it especially reprehensible to snatch newborn calves from their mothers shortly after birth. Cows are exemplary mothers--better than the whole lot of young, uneducated teen "brats" who bring babies into the world and haven't a clue what is going to be required of them as a parent.

So, people...enjoy your dairy products but remember the words of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, who won the Nobel Prize for Peace, "Think occasionally of the suffering of which you spare yourself the sight!"

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David Soll 03:10 PM on 7/18/2010

38 Fans

Obviously, since we humans are at the top of the food chain (based on our supposed higher level of intelligence) we see all the other animals of the world as food...

The basic question is this though: Just because we are in a position of power over everything on the Earth, does not mean we should treat any of it terribly. No one can convince me that these animals don't 'feel' ... so the underlying message here is --> Just because we can, doesn't mean we should! Profit over basic dignity is not a sound or worthy goal we should be defending. Doing so is not also going to lead down the road to Communism either.

Kill the cows in as humane way as possible. Treat them with some basic amount of dignity while alive (of course we humans cannot even treat each other with basic forms of dignity, so how can we expect us to do the same for other species) so maybe what I'm saying doesn't much matter? Maybe we humans don't deserve our position on this planet?

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kati 10:34 AM on 7/17/2010

0 Fans

Things that are too cheap thus not appreciated. Same goes for too much of anything. We have too much, we buy too much, we throw things out by ton, including food. We can always buy more. How sad. The true cost of eggs, for example, can not be paid for, but \$5 each might help. In reality though, we don't need them at all, same for dairy, same for flesh.

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SusanElizabeth1949 12:31 PM on 7/17/2010

61 Fans



in other words, since you believe those foods to be unnecessary you want them priced so that the 99% of Americans who disagree with that position have to act like they agree with you for economic reasons??

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professor 06:44 PM on 7/16/2010

24 Fans

Now, apparently, treating farm animals humanely is going to make people on food stamps starve! The sky, apparently, really is falling. It seems any time anyone tries to make even the slightest improvement in anyone or anything's condition, someone somewhere starts using the sky-falling trope. Never do anything. The sky will fall.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

SusanElizabeth1949 12:44 PM on 7/17/2010

61 Fans



Tell you what, professor, you empty your refrigerator, freezer and pantry, leaving perhaps some herbs/spices and a very little bit of flour etc and then try feeding your self on the California allotment of food stamps of 200 per month (this is the max allotment, many don't get that much) which works out to \$50 bucks a month. It runs about 165 per month (again maximum allotment) when you go 2-8 persons and drops after that because a 9 or more person household adds a maximum benefit of another \$150 per individual.

Do that a couple of months and then tell us how well you did. And do it as the urban poor have to, with limited access to supermarkets or farmer's markets (even if they have access most Farmers Markets can't handle EBT cards).

I've never been in that position, but I've seen those who were and for a few days every month they were eating little or some "10/\$1" packaged noodle dish which just stops hunger pangs.

Before the flaming begins, I just want everyone to think about the unintended consequences of many people's views and their effect on 'the least amongst' us.

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goldfarmer 05:37 PM on 7/18/2010

27 Fans

Most omnivores posting here want the best animal treatment possible. Prop 2 only made sense when AB 1437 was coupled with it. But if there is no funding to enforce it, AB 1437 has the potential to backfire in a major way. A sustainable CA egg industry with no power to fight off "just past State line" industrially produced eggs is not viable.

As a CA farmer, I'm excited by the potential of an overhauled egg industry here (I'm even considering getting into egg production now). But, the State has a proven history of budget defaults.

That's what scares me.

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goldfarmer 10:09 PM on 7/15/2010

27 Fans

Just a question...

Does anyone know how AB 1437 will be enforced? Will the State of CA send officials out to relocated egg farms in Arizona & Nevada in order to inspect them? Or will another State's Ag Office just give CA the finger & say "sue us if you think we're lying".

I sure hope AB 1437 isn't just feel good legislation. Thousands of jobs and tax revenue sources will simply dry up if in-State, smaller scale egg producers aren't given a fair market playing field with the out of State producers.

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SusanElizabeth1949 04:38 PM on 7/16/2010

61 Fans



Since the law regarding eggs sold is legislation not part of Prop 2, my guess it was a combination of 'feel good legislation' and a sop to the in State egg industry so the pols can say they 'tried to protect California Businesses'. From what I can tell there is no enforcement mechanism nor funding in the bill.

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goldfarmer 02:30 PM on 7/15/2010

27 Fans

Response to Mr. Robbins- part 4

That separate milk usually goes to feed replacement calves, sometimes pigs, or dumped out.

Replacement heifers are kept in pens for two reasons. The first is that until calves can be trained off the milk bottle, pens are the most efficient way to provide for there nutritional needs. The second is that pens are the most efficient way to provide for their medical needs. Many smaller end of the "factory" spectrum dairies still keep the calf with it's mother for a few days for colostrum intake. Many larger dairies do a separate parlor milking of new mother cows specifically to provide calves with the colostrum they need. After a few days, EVERY SINGLE DAIRY IN THE WORLD, WHETHER IT BE FREE RANGE, ORGANIC, OR FEED LOT MUST REMOVE THE CALF FROM IT'S MOTHER. If someone has a problem with this, they should not consume dairy products. However, I do not accept that practice as the definition of inhumane treatment.

On male calves: I do not support the Veal industry. Holstien, Jersey, and Gurnsey bulls can make a fine 2 year old grass fed steak.

In closing, I offer some solutions.

*strict per 'occupied' acre herd limits.

*stripping the milk support price of ANY connection to volume produced.

*anti-trust lawsuits against the largest of price fixing dairy companies (a practice that is very real),

*remove EVERY TAX BENEFIT for keeping herds beyond the land's animal carrying capacity.

*USDA policies that require decentralized regional distribution.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

jumbotron16 02:40 PM on 7/15/2010

60 Fans



Awesome posts, thank you goldfarmer!!

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goldfarmer 04:40 PM on 7/15/2010

27 Fans

Jumbo,
I've learned a lot from all the farmers/homesteaders/informed locavores on Huff Po over the past few weeks... so thank YOU!

Now let's see if Mr Robbins is willing to take this article away from the clutch of urban ignorance, and into the hands of real societal change.

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grumpyfarmer 04:37 PM on 7/15/2010



160 Fans

Not as much time now as the last few weeks, I just want to say AWESOME 4 posts Goldfarmer. I will be interested to see the responses to you later on.

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goldfarmer 02:17 PM on 7/15/2010

27 Fans

Response to Mr. Robbins- part 3

As a former San Joaquin Valley, CA dairy farmer... I am no friend of what dairy practices here have evolved into. I believe the only way to stop these common and un-natural practices is through strict herd limit numbers per acre grazed, and, the complete over haul of the milk support price system. I would be happy to discuss this further, if there is any interest. Dairies are not managed naturally anymore here, not because the farmer is a greedy & abusive business owner. A 160 acre irrigated pasture dairy here can only support around 160 milkers. It would be impossible for a dairy owner of that size to clear a meager \$35,000/year after all operating costs - that is assuming they are shipping Certified Organic milk. Conventional milk can NEVER be profitable with 160 cows here.

Counter to what you have implied, mastitis laced milk is rare in our milk supply. Mastitis happens in all cows, free range or not, and whether they are with their offspring or not. Control of mastitis is simply a part of animal husbandry. There are strict limits to coliform and somatic cell test counts that mastitis pus would send through the roof, causing a grower to be severely docked in pay, or not paid for a milk batch at all. Sick cows are ALWAYS milked separately. That milk is what we used to can the 'bucket milk' (kept separate from the shipped milk tank).

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goldfarmer 02:12 PM on 7/15/2010

27 Fans

Response to Mr. Robbins- part 2

Those practices are common because it is virtually impossible to run a profitable dairy on year round pasture in CA. 600 non-Organic cows is roughly the minimum herd number needed to supply the milk volume needed to 'break even'. Carrying capacity of land around Fresno, CA (my home turf) is about a cow per acre. Running irrigated pasture on 600 acres, and then bringing those cows in twice a day to a State inspected milking parlor is financially inefficient. The cost and availability of Sierra Nevada snow run off water, water that naturally ended up on the Valley floor during flood season any way, is also a major factor. This is why all CA dairy owners use some form of stacion 'feed lot' system where the cows come to the food, and closer to the the milk house.

Do you know how much 600 acres of productive farm land with expensive 'public' water access, or multiple expensive deep well pumps costs in CA? Stirring up sentiments against modern dairy production in CA, WITHOUT also offering the reasons why those dairies function the way they do is irresponsible at best, and supportive of animal rights propaganda and consumer ignorance at worst. With only 2% of the US population involved in farming, 98% of people reading your article don't know any better than to not question the economic nuances of the points you've raised.

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goldfarmer 02:08 PM on 7/15/2010

27 Fans

Response to Mr. Robbins-

The farmers/homesteaders who post here can all rip the practices of the industrial meat & dairy industry a 'new one'. But unlike many commentators here (and also you it seems), we can also see that it is economics, distribution, and government policies & regulations that FAVOR industrial meat & dairy production.

I grew up dairy farming in central CA. I know the business here very well. I don't know a single large dairy owner or cattle rancher here that ships to creameries, or to companies which feed lot finish meat here in central CA, that wouldn't run their animals on 160 acres of irrigated pasture IN A HEART BEAT - only if the economic & political system would allow them to keep the land and make a decent living by doing so.

I viewed the video you chose to include to support your article. There is absolutely nothing in that video that can be labeled "brutality" as you have done. I saw no evidence of animal abuse at all. What I did see are common practices on 99% of dairy farms in CA, whether they are Organic or not.

Now, I can concede that those practices are certainly not 'natural' (which is one of the reasons my

family is not in the dairy business any more).

Continued...

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BlackYowe 03:43 PM on 7/14/2010

69 Fans



The problem is I have seen so called free range operations. The mega farms do what they always do, skirt the law by adapting just enough to meet the laws requirements. The birds are still over crowded and still are fed antibiotics.

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Lunamoth 04:22 PM on 7/14/2010

116 Fans



Corporate mentality in feathered form.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

BlackYowe 09:16 PM on 7/14/2010

69 Fans



Yes the animals and land are treated like machines by corporations not as living things.

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Trubulmaker 02:03 PM on 7/14/2010

17 Fans

Making false representations about how a commodity is produced is plain fraud. If consumers didn't care about how the animals are kept, there would be no point to these commercials... just as the author asserts... these industry mouthpieces clearly INTEND to deceive the consumer.

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kjazzinphx 10:46 PM on 7/14/2010

3 Fans

Excellent point. Consumers are starting to care and this deceitful commercials are a reaction to that.

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rockfb 01:01 PM on 7/14/2010

1 Fans

ppl in towns and cities have these sad, erroneous "facts" jammed down their throats - and they buy it hook, line and sinker. i have no connection to the farming community, but i live among them. i drive all over PA, NJ, DE, OH, and NY and i have never seen (except once and tons of ppl called to report it) cows standing in feces and waist deep in crappy mud. all i've ever seen is cows out in the pastures happily munching away - they are clean, well fed, with their babies playing at their hooves. we rarely even see veal calves contained any longer.

to get a closer look, i even started stopping for eggs and beef at a few different farms....i peek around in the buildings when they go get whatever i want, and the conditions are wonderful!!! roomy areas for the chickens with fresh sawdust and straw bedding, clean barns, etc.

pix depicting the worst of the worst does not make it the norm, there are deviants in every walk of life. get in your car and investigate for yourselves, don't allow yourselves to be taken in by this media hype!!!

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ttp 001 01:34 PM on 7/14/2010

6 Fans

We're talking about CAFOs: confined (or concentrated) animal feeding operations. These are large factories that don't even resemble the bucolic farms you see as you drive across the Northeast. You don't buy any produce at these "farms" because there isn't any and you certainly won't be poking around their buildings unless you want to be arrested (or worse). Don't you find it suspicious that reporters are not allowed to enter a CAFO? These are operations that supply the vast majority of the world's meat and reporters are banned.

I live in PA and the small family owned farms around me are more typical of what you describe. The majority of the problems are associated with the intensive confinement of large numbers of animals for pure profit. These animals spend their entire lives in misery as a product on an assembly line. If you happen to gain entry into one of these large factories, you're more likely to see something like this...

<http://ediblearia.com/2009/04/28/are-factory-farms-spreading-deadly-flu/>

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

elcerritan 04:19 PM on 7/14/2010

65 Fans



What's encouraging about what you and rockfb have said is that there still ARE small family farms in the Northeast, where the animals are cared for and have a decent life. I grew up in northern Delaware and that certainly was the case when I lived there. We need to do more to support those operations, like buying from them when we can, and working, politically, to see that things like having to comply with "one size fits all" regulations that were drafted with industrial scale agriculture and food processing in mind don't become an obstacles to the "little guys" being able to survive. We need to vote with our forks and put our money where our mouths are.

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Lunamo 04:35 PM on 7/14/2010

116 Fans



Not all farms are awful places, to be sure. But you are delusional. You Drive by farms and don't see cows standing in WAIST deep mud and you see a cow with a calf in a pasture and you think things are grand? If you saw a calf with a cow, anyway, it's not a MILK cow. And when was the last time you actually looked for a calf in a DARK pen in a barn fed on only milk? You don't usually see those when you Drive all over or take a Peek as you're there buying beef. Sad.

 Reply

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

jumbotron16 04:38 PM on 7/14/2010

60 Fans



It is disingenuous to argue against factory farming for the sole purpose of promoting a vegan diet. There are many alternatives to factory farming other than going vegan. If you have a problem with eating meat, just say so--don't pretend your problem is with factory farming.

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saskatoonie 08:18 PM on 7/14/2010

39 Fans

If a person is there buying beef they have every right to ask the farmer how he/she keeps their cows and to take a tour of the facilities. Do you want the cows outdoors or indoors? Please make up your mind!

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Svetlana P 11:19 AM on 7/14/2010

0 Fans

How does this new bill solve the problem of factory farming? Cause from what I understand the bill does not state that all hen farms should be free-range. It just states that eggs that are not free-range cannot be sold to CA residents. Basically you can have factory farming on CA land, as long as you sell to other states.....hmmm.....that's a step in NO direction

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cwebster 11:06 AM on 7/14/2010

14 Fans

Canada was lucky enough to have a highly ethical scientist, Margaret Hayden, in place when approval was sought.

The story is quite appalling:

<http://www.consumerhealth.org/articles/display.cfm?ID=19991128221446>

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Lunamoth 04:40 PM on 7/14/2010

116 Fans



Love Canada. Is there any place up there that's a little warmer than the rest?

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saskatoonie 08:20 PM on 7/14/2010

39 Fans

Some of us posting here are Canadian farmers who don't like your attitude toward our American farming brothers and sisters.

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arthurb3 10:37 AM on 7/14/2010

12 Fans

John

Since you family fortune was made on milk products this seems ironic but what you say about the commercials can be applied to any product! Do energy and protein bar consumers all have healthy looking bodies? Are all vegans skinny and healthy? No. So the commercials are made to sell a product.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

John Robbins 03:10 PM on 7/14/2010

63 Fans

Arthur, My father's fortune was made selling ice cream, but I walked away from the company and the money a long time ago. If you're interested, I tell the full story in The New Good Life: Living Better Than Ever in an Age of Less.

It's true that when I buy a beer, I don't expect to get two women in bikinis standing next to me. Many ads exploit the desires of people for happier and more exciting lives. But the "happy cow" campaign is uniquely irresponsible and deplorable. Our society is not experiencing a concerted and serious social movement composed of people from all walks of life demanding that commercial beer products come with women in bikinis. There is, however, exactly that kind of movement demanding that dairy and other animal food products come from humanely treated animals and environmentally sustainable practices. That is why I wrote that the "happy cow" ads are an insult to the legitimate humanitarian concerns of millions of people.

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