

# **A conversation with Nick Cooney, February 10, 2017**

## **Participants**

- Nick Cooney – Executive Vice President, Mercy for Animals
- Nicole Ross – Research Analyst, Open Philanthropy Project
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**Note:** These notes were compiled by the Open Philanthropy Project and give an overview of the major points made by Mr. Cooney.

## **Summary**

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Mr. Cooney of Mercy for Animals (MFA; [www.mercyforanimals.org](http://www.mercyforanimals.org)). In February 2016, the Open Philanthropy Project granted MFA \$1 million over two years to build capacity for cage-free egg campaigns, followed in August 2016 by an additional \$1 million over two years specifically for international cage-free advocacy. Conversation topics included the achievements, plans, and budgets of both the domestic and international campaigns.

## **U.S. and Canada**

### **Activities**

#### *Staff*

In the spring of 2016, MFA hired four staff in the U.S. and one in Canada.

#### *Methods*

MFA initially reaches out to companies to discuss transition to cage-free eggs, then conducts negative publicity campaigns if this is unsuccessful. Around 10-12 major campaigns and a similar number of smaller ones were carried out in the U.S. and Canada in 2016.

#### *Target companies*

In the U.S., the focus has been on retailers, particularly chains of grocery stores but also some convenience stores and cash and carry wholesalers. Combined, the retail sector accounts for ~55% of caged egg usage in the country.

In Canada, MFA has targeted every sector: distributors, bakeries, restaurants, etc. as well as retailers.

#### *Outcomes*

The campaign has been very successful, winning around 80-90 corporate commitments to go cage-free in 2016.

A number of U.S. companies had already made commitments by late spring when the program started, and MFA persuaded many more grocery chains to join them later in the year: a few large, some mid-sized, and a lot of small ones. On average, about one or two fairly small companies (impacting 20,000-100,000 animals per year) have made pledges each week since the summer of 2016.

In Canada, around 75-80% of the food sector committed to going cage-free as a result of MFA's actions, including almost all major retailers, grocery stores, distributors, and bakeries.

### **Six-month plans**

MFA will continue its corporate outreach and campaigns. In the U.S., there are still a number of retailers, convenience stores, and restaurants that are large enough to be worth approaching. MFA is still working with a few fairly small chains in Canada, but there are not many more that would be cost-effective to approach, so activities there will end soon.

MFA will also create a public online tracker. This will list the leading companies in all sectors in the U.S. and Canada (and perhaps elsewhere in future), stating the commitment they made, progress to date (i.e. percentage of eggs that are cage-free), and deadline for becoming totally cage-free. This will make it easier for MFA to monitor and follow up with companies.

### **Budget**

#### *Salaries*

The main cost has been staff salaries. Around \$250,000 was allotted to this, but since most staff joined in April 2016, the money will last until early 2018.

#### *Investigations*

Around \$100,000 was spent on three investigations (two in the U.S. and one in Canada). Two of these were very successful; one led to Egglund's Best, the largest specialty branded egg producer in the U.S. with 15 million egg-laying hens, committing to going 100% cage-free.

#### *Other expenses*

There were some fairly minor campaign expenses and program costs, such as advertising, video production, computer and telecommunications equipment, and recruitment of active volunteers ("Hen Heroes").

### **International campaigns**

Outside Canada and the U.S., MFA has so far worked with two countries: Mexico and Brazil.

## **Mexico**

### *Staff*

There was some trouble hiring good staff, but MFA hired one very good staff in September 2016, and is about to hire two more who seem promising.

### *Activities and expectations*

MFA has reached out to 20-25 companies over the last four to six months. Though work in Mexico has been challenging, MFA believes it will eventually persuade the majority of large restaurants, bakeries, and food service companies to go cage-free. A number of Mexican companies have already made commitments, including the top four or five restaurant chains and the largest baker, though just one retailer has pledged so far. The top two food service companies will also go cage-free as a consequence of global commitments.

## **Brazil**

### *Staff*

The program in Brazil has hired four coordinators and expects to hire the final two by March 2017.

### *Activities and achievements*

When the first coordinator began in September 2016, there had been no specific cage-free commitments in Brazil, though a couple global ones (such as Unilever's) affected the country.

MFA's initial focus was on restaurants, starting with Burger King, the second largest chain in the country. Burger King had been targeted by another organization for 18 months, and had been talking with Humane Society International, but had not yet made a commitment. MFA persuaded the company to commit. This was followed by several of the other largest owners of restaurant chains: McDonald's, Subway, and some regional companies. Some of these were parent companies that ran a number of chains, so a total of 35 branded chains have committed so far, and more are expected to commit soon.

Similar success is expected with food service companies. MFA has begun conversations with a number of the largest ones.

## **Budget**

MFA's international program is probably a little below budget. The division of funding is similar to the U.S. and Canada program: mainly salaries, with some for campaigns, investigations, and miscellaneous expenses. In addition, a portion has been set aside for the legal research that is required in both Mexico and Brazil.

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<http://www.openphilanthropy.org/research/conversations>