

## **A conversation with Josh Balk, February 9, 2017**

### **Participants**

- Josh Balk – Vice President, Farm Animal Protection, The Humane Society of the United States
- Lewis Bollard – Program Officer, Farm Animal Welfare, 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 Josh Balk.

### **Summary**

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Mr. Balk of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) as part of a grant update

<https://www.openphilanthropy.org/focus/us-policy/farm-animal-welfare/humane-society-united-states-corporate-cage-free-campaigns>).

Conversation topics included progress on cage-free reform efforts, keeping an eye on company commitments, how time has been spent since the previous update, how remaining funding will be spent, plans for the future, and lessons learned from the grant.

### **Progress on corporate campaigns for cage-free egg reform**

Much of HSUS's cage-free reform work has involved collaborating with companies to enact policies that eliminate the confinement of egg-laying hens in cages. Since many of these policy announcements came from major food companies, their commitment to cage-free reform represented a precedent that other companies have followed.

As a result of the efforts led by HSUS and other farm animal welfare groups, the majority of egg-buyers in the US have now announced cage-free policies.

### **Keeping an eye on company commitments**

While most companies will likely fulfill their pledges as promised, some may attempt to find excuses not to fully enact the farm animal welfare policies agreed upon in previous commitments. This is something to keep an eye on mainly in the grocery sector, where companies may, in the future, try to argue that consumers aren't purchasing enough cage-free eggs to warrant a rapid transition, which would likely only occur if grocers inflate the price of cage-free eggs. In this case, grocers would likely ask HSUS for extensions to achieve a full transition to cage-free eggs, which HSUS would not agree to.

Since no such excuse could be made in the restaurant and consumer packaged goods (CPG) sectors, this is unlikely to be raised as a concern.

### **Work to ensure follow-through on pledges**

HSUS sees monitoring companies and ensuring their commitments as a major priority. In the time between its current and subsequent campaigns (currently focused on broiler chickens), HSUS plans on reopening conversations with corporations that have made cage-free commitments. Through these talks, HSUS will determine whether or not firms have made adequate progress and ensure that they have a plan for how to fully achieve the goals outlined in commitments.

In the case that a company does not cooperate with the follow-up on commitment progress, HSUS will consider exerting more pressure.

### **Using public policy to ensure commitment**

HSUS uses public policy victories to demonstrate to firms that laws are narrowing what can be considered acceptable treatment of animals. This will help ensure that firms' cage-free commitments are taken seriously, and in states where laws have passed, ensure that companies indeed follow through, sometimes in shorter timeframes than originally thought.

HSUS also uses company commitments to bolster support for public policy initiatives. For example, HSUS has used the cage-free commitments of low-cost food providers like Dollar Tree and McDonald's to argue that enacting animal welfare reform wouldn't increase food costs.

Although HSUS's public policy initiatives and corporate campaigning are mutually beneficial, no specific coordination between the two activities exists. Since most major grocers operate nationally, it would be difficult to successfully target them through a state ballot initiative. However, the states in which HSUS pursues ballot initiatives are large enough to still affect national corporations' policies.

### **Verification of commitments**

Publicly traded companies are likely to be honest about progress on their commitments. Any corruption or fraud would be discoverable and could result in legal action.

It may be more difficult to verify that private companies are being transparent about their commitments. HSUS will urge these firms to be public about steps they are taking and will take necessary steps if met with resistance.

## **Time spent since last update**

### **Massachusetts ballot measure initiative**

By the end of July of 2016, HSUS had concluded its corporate campaigns for cage-free reforms. Since then, its primary focus has been to help pass Question 3—a Massachusetts ballot measure that bans the sale of eggs, veal, and pork coming from confined farm animals.

HSUS has had significant experience in leading campaigns to pass state ballot measures—including in Florida, Arizona, and California. After prompting most major buyers in the US to adopt gestation crate-free and cage-free policies, HSUS saw passing Question 3 as an opportunity to solidify reform efforts. HSUS worked on the campaign to pass Question 3 for roughly a year, and its efforts increased in advance of the election from August to November 2016. The initiative passed with 78% of the vote.

### **Corporate campaigning for broiler chicken welfare**

From November of 2016 to January of 2017, HSUS began focusing its attention on corporate campaigns for broiler chicken welfare reform. It returned to companies it had worked with on gestation crate-free pork and cage-free eggs, this time advocating for broiler chicken reform. In early November, HSUS announced policies with Compass Group and Aramark to improve the way broiler chickens in their supply chains are treated. Shortly thereafter, HSUS announced a similar policy with Sodexo.

No major change in campaign tactics was needed to pivot HSUS's focus towards broiler chickens. The Farm Animal Protection division internally agreed that it was the best next step and had the plan approved by HSUS CEO Wayne Pacelle and its board.

### **Grant funding**

With the remaining \$1,500,000 in funding from the Open Philanthropy Project, HSUS will continue reform efforts for broiler chicken welfare. It believes this focus area is where funds will create the most impact. Its current hope is to get many major companies that buy chicken meat to enact broiler chicken welfare policies by the end of 2017.

### **Future work**

After achieving significant progress with broiler chicken welfare, ensuring that policies are followed through with may be the next logical step. HSUS may also look at issues such as aquaculture.

## **Lessons learned from the grant**

In 2011, HSUS worked with United Egg Producers to draft a federal bill dealing with the treatment of egg-laying hens and labeling of egg products. The bill didn't pass because various interests within the animal agriculture industry opposed it. While HSUS couldn't foresee this roadblock at the time, it is now better attuned to pick projects that are likely to be more effective.

*All Open Philanthropy Project conversations are available at <http://www.openphilanthropy.org/research/conversations>*