

# Campaign to outlaw sow housing in Florida advances

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In November 2002, Floridians will vote to decide whether an amendment should be added to the state constitution outlawing the use of individual sow gestation stalls.

Animal rights groups, which lobbied the state legislature unsuccessfully for a similar law in 2000, gathered about 690,000 signatures to get the proposed amendment on the ballot—about 200,000 more than the 489,000 required to get a proposed constitutional amendment on the ballot.

If passed, the amendment will not go into effect for six years and does not outlaw the use of farrowing crates or other forms of restraint necessary for veterinary procedures.



Individual gestation stalls are used by some pork producers to house pregnant sows throughout most of their pregnancy. The stalls are about 2 foot by 7 foot and allow the sow to stand and lie down but often prevent her from turning around. Farrowing crates are used to house pregnant sows from a few days prior to delivery until their young are weaned. The crates restrict the movement of the sow to prevent her from crushing her young.

Animal rights activists called the campaign a victory against factory farming.

"We have the solid support of concerned Floridians who believe that the use of gestation crates is cruel and unnecessary," said Nanci Alexander, founder of the Animal Rights Foundation of Florida, one of the groups sponsoring the campaign. "They look forward to voting in November to prevent industrial hog factories from taking root here."

Some veterinarians and farming organizations said they are disappointed the amendment made it on the ballot, but say even if it passes, it will have little effect on farming in Florida.

There are few pork producers in the state, according to Frankie Hall, the associate director of agricultural policy for the Florida Farm Bureau Federation. Hall said there are fewer than 10,000 sows in the state and that only two farmers use gestation crates—so roughly 600 to 700 sows would be affected by the amendment.

"Corporate agriculture, as far as swine production, is not coming to Florida," Hall said, explaining that

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Hall said the amendment doesn't belong in the state constitution and that the animal rights groups are masking their true agenda.

"They are pushing a vegetarian agenda," he said.

The American Association of Swine Veterinarians said the amendment ran contrary to the resolution submitted by the AASV and passed in July by the AVMA House of Delegates on pregnant sow housing. The resolution states:

The AVMA supports the use of sow housing configurations that:

- 1.) Minimize aggression and competition between sows.
- 2.) Protect sows from detrimental effects associated with environmental extremes, particularly temperature extremes.
- 3.) Reduce exposure to hazards that result in injuries.
- 4.) Provide every animal with daily access to appropriate food and water.
5. Facilitate observation of individual sow appetite, respiratory rate, urination and defecation, and reproductive status by caretakers.

Current scientific literature indicates that individual gestation stalls meet each of the aforementioned criteria, provided the appropriate level of stockmanship is administered.

"We are concerned a precedent might be established that could affect big pork-producing states," said Dr. David Madsen, the AASV delegate to the AVMA House of Delegates.

The campaign, which also had the backing of the Humane Society of the United States, the Fund for Animals, and Farm Sanctuary, was unique because volunteers from throughout the United States were recruited to help gather the signatures of Florida residents.

"It's a little peculiar to Florida because it is such a tourist destination," said Wayne Pacelle, a senior vice president of the HSUS, who explained that many of the volunteers worked signature collecting into their vacations.

Pacelle, who is also the co-founder of Humane USA, a political action group that focuses on animal rights laws, noted later that many mainstream animal rights groups are committing more time and effort to campaigns to change public policy through legislation.

"(They) are moving away from protest and direct action methods of addressing public policy issues," he said.

Pacelle added that the Florida campaign is a part of growing public criticism of industrial farming.

"There's a general disgust with this form of animal abuse," he said.

But according to the National Pork Producer's Council, the amendment has little to do with animal welfare.

"We feel there are other issues at play than animal welfare," said Kara Flynn, a spokeswoman for the council in Washington, D.C. She said that animal right's groups targeted Florida because most people in Florida know little about the way food animals are raised and the science behind it.

"If it was being done in Iowa where people understand livestock technology, (the outcome) would be different."

According to Flynn, Hall, and Dr. Madsen, the animals in the pens are not mistreated and research supports the use of the crates.

"There's sound science behind it," Flynn said.

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