

## Animal Activist Rallies Showcase Continued Pressure on Agriculture

August 18, 2011- Each summer, animal activists travel across the country to meet and discuss the latest topics of the animal rights movement. This year, animal agriculture was once again the focus. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) hosted its annual Taking Action for Animals Conference in Washington, D.C. on July 15-18, and Farm Animal Rights Movement's Animal Rights 2011 Conference (AR 2011) was held two weeks later on July 21-25 in Los Angeles. Both events claimed to have "record-breaking" attendance, attracting a combined total of more than 1,600 activists from around the world, ranging in age from 20-60 years old.

Securing rights for farm animals and the promotion of a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle to the mainstream public were hot topics at both meetings. Attendees were given tips on how to utilize social media, create "undercover" videos and craft effective messages to share their views with others. Speakers and exhibitors also encouraged aspiring activists to hold demonstrations, signature drives for ballot initiatives and leafleting campaigns.

The largest activist groups attended and sponsored both meetings, although messaging differed between audiences. Nathan Runkle, Executive Director of Mercy For Animals, Erica Meier, Executive Director of Compassion Over Killing, and Gene Baur, President of Farm Sanctuary, spoke at both meetings. They encouraged a more aggressive, physical approach to eliminating animal agriculture at AR 2011, which is seen as the more extremist meeting. For more information about the most active animal rights groups, access the Alliance's updated activist profile report.

Both conferences discussed a growing embrace of the vegetarian lifestyle in the mainstream media. Speakers used inflated statistics (often citing their own studies) to increase misconceptions about animal agriculture and its effects on the environment and one's health. The sessions on farm animal rights were the most widely attended at both conferences, with five presentations devoted to the topic including, "The Global Campaign Against Factory Farming," "Advances in Farm Animal Protection," and "Agriculture Campaigns."

Tafa included a formal vegan banquet with keynote speakers HSUS President and CEO Wayne Pacelle and Congressman Jim Moran (D-Va.). Both speakers stressed the importance of lobbying and having a presence in Washington, D.C. to promote animal rights on Capitol Hill. Tafa and AR 2011 featured an exclusively vegan menu for all guests. It should be noted that, in contrast to the lifestyle choices advocated for by the conference speakers, 97 percent of Americans enjoy meat, milk, and egg products as part of their diet.

Throughout Tafa, HSUS shared examples of celebrities and mainstream media outlets that promote a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle. Though HSUS regularly attempts to portray itself as a mainstream organization, many of its conference speakers and attendees strongly advocate for animal rights. At AR 2011, the recommended tactics discussed were more extreme, including use of violence, sabotage to farms and other illegal actions.

Most people are not aware of these animal activist groups' true motives to end all animal agriculture and rid the human diet of meat, eggs and dairy. For example, the "Meatless Monday" campaign is marketed as a mainstream idea to cut meat out of the diet for one day a week to improve one's health and the environment. However, this well-funded campaign was founded by the husband of a wealthy, longtime animal rights activist and it actually pushes an extreme animal rights and environmental agenda by promoting false claims about animal agriculture.

"Meatless Monday" was discussed at both TAFE and AR 2011 by HSUS, Compassion Over Killing, and Mercy for Animals, all who referred to the campaign as a start to a vegetarian or vegan outreach lifestyle. Numerous celebrities, school systems, mainstream media and even cities were mentioned as having joined the campaign. Each presenter claimed that at least 51 percent of the American public is familiar with the "Meatless Monday" campaign, and that 18 percent actively participate, though a source for the statistic was not produced. Josh Balk of HSUS discussed the campaign as a way to not only get people to start eating vegetarian, but to "save 1.4 billion farm animals."

The new agreement between HSUS and United Egg Producers to seek federal legislation for housing standards for egg laying hens was also discussed at both conferences. Audience members seemed upset about the agreement, noting HSUS "caved" by giving up its cage-free campaign. Others were frustrated because they had devoted time and energy to collecting signatures for the ballot. Kitty Jones, a 17-year-old student, was praised for her individual work of collecting more than 10,000 signatures for the proposed Washington state ballot initiative campaign. On the other hand, some of the activist groups viewed the agreement as a "monumental victory" for HSUS, although some attendees were wary of working with the agriculture industry. HSUS staff asserted that the biggest hurdle would be agricultural lawmakers in Congress.

Farmers and ranchers should educate themselves on the threat these groups represent. Unfortunately, most people are not aware of these extremists groups' true agenda against animal agriculture. TAFE and AR 2011 showcased animal activists' real beliefs that are often hidden behind emotionally appealing and celebrity funded public relations campaigns. It is critical that all stakeholders correct the misinformation presented by these activist groups, showcase the wonderful families and businesses involved in farming, ranching and food production and share with the public your commitment to your animals, the environment, food safety and continuous improvement. The Alliance will continue to work to bridge the gap between farmers and consumers to show that while today's agriculture industry has evolved to meet the needs of society, the same core values remain.

#### TAFE and AR Quotes

"We want consumers to choose compassion, and STAY vegan!"

– Erica Meier (Compassion Over Killing), AR 2011

"The prime audience to this issue is the youth. They are most open-minded to the issue."

– Michael Weber (FARM), AR 2011

"The day will come when veganism is supported and activists won't be regarded as radicals, but rather as heroes."

– Melanie Joy (Author: "Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows"), AR 2011

“Showing compassion in these farms will get you fired.”

– Brian Monell ("Undercover Investigator" and Animal Liberation Front Spokesperson), AR 2011

“For some reason animal agriculture is stuck in the mud for technology.”

–Josh Balk (HSUS), TAFE

“Lots of donations and money go to rescue dogs and cats, however the public does not understand that every cow, pig and chicken needs to be rescued too.”

– Nathan Runkle (MFA), TAFE

“Far too long we have let the opposition think we need factory farming to feed the world, we can feed the world better without factory farming.”

– Mahi Klosterhalfen (Albert Schweitzer Foundation), TAFE

“Law enforcement may be resistant. They don’t know how to deal with animal issues so they would rather ignore it.”

–Adam Parascandola (HSUS), TAFE

“I believe it’s feasible to end factory farming by 2050.”

– Phillip Lymbery (Compassion in World Farming), TAFE

The full text of the Alliance's report on both animal rights meetings is available on the Members section of the website. For more information, contact Communications Director Sarah Hubbard at [shubbart@animalagalliance.org](mailto:shubbart@animalagalliance.org).

The Animal Agriculture Alliance, a 501c (3) non-profit organization, is a broad-based coalition of individual farmers, ranchers, producer organizations, suppliers, packer-processors, private industry, scientists, veterinarians and retailers. The Alliance's mission is to communicate the important role of animal agriculture to our nation's economy, productivity, vitality and security and that animal well-being is central to producing safe, high-quality, affordable food and other products essential to our daily lives.