

Honorable Representatives

The Michigan Land Use Institute appreciates the committee's work to modify House Bills 5127 and 5128, but we remain opposed to this "animal welfare" legislation.

Current substitutes do not address our primary concerns, described below. Specifically, we believe the legislation must:

- Not allow extreme confinement to pass for humane or safe animal treatment (gestation crates, battery cages are two examples that threaten public health and are neither safe nor humane).
- Not burden MI farms or the state budget with a costly and questionable inspection system, especially in this time when the state cannot afford many of its basic functions.
- Take time to include more voices and views from both farmers and consumers active in the burgeoning market for safe, healthy, trustworthy foods.

Michigan Land Use Institute position on House Bills 5127 and 5128

Michigan farmers deserve a big seal of approval for all they do to protect our environment and produce tasty, healthy, trustworthy food.

But to mean anything, that seal cannot go to farms that harm the environment or put dangerous products on the market.

Yet that is exactly what state lawmakers are proposing with legislation that would stamp "A-OK" on products that today's shoppers are signaling they do not want.

The legislation would sow confusion in the market by giving government protection to big, confined animal feeding operations, which are catching consumer heat over their

meat's safety.

Worse, the bills actually burden the larger majority of Michigan livestock farms, which do not pose such safety problems.

House Bills 5127 and 5128 establish an "animal welfare" certification program. If written correctly, they could help Michigan's many small and medium-scale livestock farms distinguish the meat that they raise humanely and safely. Our smaller farms could use that assistance to take advantage of new, profitable business opportunities- and strengthen Michigan's economy-now that consumers are asking where food comes from and how it's raised.

But the current legislation stymies such economic development by protecting dangerous practices and, in effect, slowing the growth of farms that could produce the kind of food the market wants and the jobs our state needs.

Even though the bills are about "animal welfare," they do not adequately address the way confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) keep pregnant pigs and chickens in cages that stop them from turning around or stretching their limbs. Issues of cruelty aside, the American Medical Association, Federal Drug Administration, Union of Concerned Scientists and other science-based organizations connect extreme confinement to serious public health threats. To keep such badly stressed, immune-suppressed animals alive, CAFOs feed them antibiotics and growth hormones. That breeds the antibiotic-resistant strains of deadly bacteria that threaten our food supply.

The legislation, which uses industry-written guidelines, directs livestock operations to give antibiotics only to animals that need them. But that's like giving towels only to swimmers who are wet, because the guidelines do not address the extreme confinement that sickens animals in the first place.

The FDA has called for a stop to the routine dosing of antibiotics at livestock factories, where extreme confinement is common. And six states have already flat-out banned such confinement.

But Michigan? Once again, one of our industries is using political power to stonewall badly needed change. In fact, these "animal welfare" bills recall Detroit's disastrous, decades-long resistance to higher mileage standards-which eventually harmed the Big Three and hundreds of thousands of people whose lives depended on them because the companies never really embraced cleaner, more fuel-efficient cars.

These sham bills are not only deceptive; they are also harmful to farms that raise animals safely and humanely. They impose new paperwork, fees, inspections, and fines that they cannot really afford-all for the sake of a highly questionable new seal of approval.

The legislation even makes consumer protection more difficult. Inspection records, which could expose dangerous practices, would be exempt from the Freedom of Information Act. The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Michigan Commission of Agriculture would have sole oversight authority; not a single public health official would sit on an advisory panel the legislation establishes.

If passed, the legislation will slow Michigan agriculture's move toward the new markets that rising interest in safer food is creating. The bills do not offer a substantive, food-safety certification system for animal welfare. That means business as usual for livestock factories and continued neglect of smaller farms' opportunities by the tax-supported agencies and universities that should be doing more to help farms meet consumer demand for safer meat.

The Michigan Legislature also has better things to do than provide cover to CAFOs. As last month's national FoodMed Conference in Detroit demonstrated, hospitals are among the many big food buyers now working to spend significant money with more local and trustworthy farms. What is missing is smaller-scale processing and distribution facilities that can move those family farm products to Michigan hospitals, such as those that have signed the international Health Care Without Harm pledge-and to nearby shoppers, schools, and restaurants.

If state lawmakers are serious about helping Michigan farms succeed in a rapidly changing market, they must challenge industry leaders by making sure the so-called "animal welfare" bills do, in fact, prohibit extreme animal confinement. And they must help communities and entrepreneurs build a market infrastructure that puts more money in farms' pockets-and better, safer food on our tables.

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Talking Local Food as Economic Development

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