



April 1, 2003

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Why an Exhibit that Discusses Animals as Utilitarian Tools Does Not Belong at the DC National Zoo

DC National Zoo Statement regarding the purpose of the proposed Kids' Farm:

Excerpts from the May 8, 2002 statement by the Director of the National Zoo, Lucy Spelman, in response to the numerous letters from individuals and groups encouraging them to abandon the controversial Kids' Farm exhibit.

"We agree that these are serious issues, which need to be considered carefully, with balance, by all of us as citizens. But the Kids' Farm at the National Zoo is intended for children 4 to 8 years of age, an audience for which we have too few exhibit programs. Our major messages are that we depend on agriculture in a surprising number of ways, including the production of food and non-food products, and that taking care of animals takes time, dedication and knowledge."

"The red barn and silo are familiar icons for farming, taken directly from many children's books and games."

"We will show, mainly in videos and ultimately through distance learning, that current farms, at least in the United States, are sprawling, technologically sophisticated, commercial complexes."

Reasons why the proposed Kids' Farm will be controversial:

Focusing on "technologically sophisticated" farms means that only factory farm interests will be promoted.

One by one, the evidence in this packet will show indisputably that all of the points that are purported to be the focus of the exhibit are in fact inaccurate. The enclosed information shows that factory farmed animals are not "cared for" by "dedicated" workers who have "knowledge" about how to care for the animals as is stated by the above mission statement for the exhibit.

Inaccurate public education will bring unwanted negative attention and controversy to the National Zoo and the Smithsonian. In light of the recent reorganization of the staff and many animal deaths over the past few months, I'm sure the zoo is looking to increase its positive public image, not create an exhibit that is sure to do the reverse.

Top Ten Reasons Why the Kids' Farm is a Bad Idea for the Smithsonian National Zoo

- 1) **Goes against the Zoo's Mission.** Discussing animals as a product for sale is a huge deviation from the zoo's mission for public education about animal behavior and conservation. The primary focus will be discussing animals in terms of being a "product" and not as being an animal. Since the exhibit discusses where food comes from, it would objectify animals as being a product for sale, whereas a zoo should be teaching about animal behavior, animal habitat, and animal conservation in an attempt to foster respect for that animal and respect for the environment in which the animal normally lives.

If zoos exist to teach the public about animals, then the exhibit should teach about a cow being an animal, not a cow as beef. It is unacceptable to discuss animals as "product" in an institution that strives to preserve animal species and improve their individual situations. After all, the zoo doesn't have alligator purses near the alligator exhibit or bear skin rugs near the bears, because the mission is to teach about the animal themselves, not the utilitarian uses for them.

- 2) **Inaccurate public education.** Public education about the horrors of factory farming is already a struggle because of its unpleasant nature of what the animals endure. If the exhibit presents farming techniques in a positive light it would be inaccurate, and it would do a lot of damage since people already do not want to believe the horrors that go on.

Though the exhibit is intended for children and is not intended to touch on controversial topics, unfortunately there is no accurate way to discuss farmed animals without unpleasantness. Children have to be brought to the exhibit by parents, so many of the viewers will be adults, not just children.

Part of the reason why public education is so hard is because people think that the government protects all animals. But, what they may not realize is that the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) excludes protection for animals if they are owned by animal-use industries. This is stated clearly in the AWA, Section 2(g), 2002, p. 5, "... animals not protected under the Animal Welfare Act are animals used for food or fiber including livestock, chickens, horses and sheep." A pdf of the AWA can be seen online at:

<http://agriculture.senate.gov/Legislation/Agricultural Law/AgMisc/Awa.pdf>.

- 3) **Misleading the public.** Fact: 95% (or more) of livestock are no longer raised on regular farms, they are raised on factory farms, which means that most of them never see daylight and most are caged with restricted movement for most of their life until the day they are hung up by one leg and slaughtered.

There is no way that the zoo can have a kids' exhibit that accurately educates about modern day farming without scaring the kids, so therefore this exhibit won't accurately educate, but instead will mislead the public about where food comes from and what the animals endure.

In an exhibit that claims to teach where our food comes from, it cannot discuss an **egg** without mentioning that it comes from a hen tightly packed into a 15-inch battery cage with many other hens. It cannot discuss **milk** or **cheese** without discussing the effects of bovine growth hormone, which causes cows to produce ten times more milk than normal causing terrible pain and infected utters. It cannot discuss **veal** without showing veal-crated calves, which is another sad by-product of the dairy industry. It cannot discuss the **transport** of animals to **auction** without mentioning the millions of sick and **downed animals** who are "legally" dragged and bulldozed onto transport trucks while still alive and able to feel pain. And, most importantly, it cannot discuss **slaughter** without discussing the 10 billion animals per year who are killed. That terrifyingly high number is just in the U.S. and excludes aquatic animals. (That is the 2001 statistic; 2003 estimates are closer to 15 billion.) Of the billions killed per year, millions of those are killed, boiled, and **skinned alive** because of the fast-paced mechanized factory farming techniques. This brutality is what ends up on family dinner plates.

- 4) **No way to avoid unpleasantness.** In an accurate discussion about where food comes from with reference to farmed animals, there is no way to avoid showing unpleasantness. If the zoo attempts to avoid uncomfortable subjects by showing only one part of a perspective, it would no longer be a completely factual picture. Even if the zoo picks and chooses some factual points out, only a complete version is the truthful version.
- 5) **Environmental degradation.** Another aspect of farming that is unpleasant is the fact that agriculture is the number one *polluter* of fresh water as well as the number one *user* of fresh water; and that is compared to ALL other industries. The excess food grown for livestock is severely detrimental to the environment in many ways, which is thoroughly discussed in the enclosed printouts from the Animal Awareness web site.

- 6) **Technologically-advanced is not good when it comes to “processing” a living being.** Just because something is sprawling and technological doesn't mean that it's good. It would be preferable to see all farms in the U.S. be small family farms where the people actually did care for their animals. "Processing" a living being though a technological assembly line is a very BAD thing no matter how it is discussed. Plus big-business is not the only legitimate business. Discussing only how technological farming has become leaves out small farmers and organic farmers. I'm sure those farmers wouldn't be too happy about an exhibit promoting only factory farming when they are struggling to survive.
- 7) **Factory Farms are not High-Tech or Efficient.** Efficiency means producing a desired result with a minimum of effort, expense, or waste. Nothing about the factory farm process works smoothly or efficiently. Animals can be seen being mishandled by very incompetent workers at every step of the process. The video “The Auction Block” (by Compassion Over Killing) shows workers poking scared cows with electric prods through very narrow shoots. Often the animals get turned around and stuck. The workers continue **poking with the electric prods** but offer no other assistance to the scared and confused animals.

The machines used for slaughter do not work as intended with accuracy. For example, the video “Meet Your Meat” (produced by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) shows footage of a pig who is carried to slaughter on an assembly line. He is hung by one leg with a chain around his hoof. Since his hoof is not large enough for the chain to wrap around and hold on to, he is seen **falling to the floor head first**, while fully conscious.

Another example of inefficiency is the fact that millions of animals a year are **not rendered unconscious** during the initial throat-slit phase or the stun-bath, which is intended to render the animal unconscious so that he won't feel what is about to happen to him next. Therefore, when the animals are put into the boiling water and skinned, they are still conscious and suffering.

Also, these farms may be large in scale, but that does not mean they are high-tech. Many crude low-tech and inhumane methods are used such as when animals are **castrated by hand with scissors** and given no pain killer, which can be seen on the video, “Meet Your Meat” produced by PETA using undercover video from within actual factory farms. Also seen on that video is the method for **debeaking chickens** while they are fully aware and able to feel pain. A lady moves at a very fast pace and can be seen inserting the beaks into a slicer without care or accuracy.

8) **Human health risks.**

Antibiotic Resistance: Factory farmed animals are housed in such unsanitary conditions that they have to be routinely fed antibiotics just to keep them alive. The antibiotics become a huge human health issue, which was noted clearly in a bill that was presented to the 107th congress. If the zoo misinforms the public about the health risks associated with eating meat and dairy products, then they could hold some liability.

Though the bill was not enacted into law, the proposed bill accurately found antibiotic resistance to be a human health threat. The findings from bill number S. 2508 are as follows, "Study after study has shown that the practice of using antibiotics to promote growth and fatten livestock erodes the effectiveness of these important pharmaceuticals. Mounting scientific evidence shows that this nontherapeutic use of antibiotics in agricultural animals can lead to development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria that can be transferred to people, making it harder to treat dangerous infections."

The bill can be seen in full at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/r107query.html>

Note: once you get to the page, type the following into the search field and hit the search button:
antibiotic resistance additives to animal feed

E-Coli: Disease transmission and illness is a risk whenever humans get too close to dried manure particles of farm animals, which is carried by the wind.

A live animal exhibit poses numerous health risks of which a zoo is obviously aware. But, farm animals add many more potential diseases than the others. This is especially true since the exhibit was unplanned and will be confined to a small corner of the zoo where room for pedestrian traffic will be a problem, which is recognized by many zoo staff. As mentioned in the articles about e-coli and other diseases transmitted by farm animals and their enclosures, illnesses can occur in many ways: airborne illnesses from dried manure, contaminated water runoff, and many others. Any sort of petting-zoo is particularly hazardous. Many zoos and fairs with farm animals have been sued and have received negative publicity due to the constant spread of disease; this exhibit would be not exception.

Articles linking e-coli illnesses to petting zoos:

ABC News: [E. Coli at Petting Zoo](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/pettingzoo001107.html): http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/pettingzoo001107.html

CNN: [CDC targets E. coli contamination at petting zoos](http://www.cnn.com/2001/fyi/news/05/14/petting.zoo.ecoli/): http://www.cnn.com/2001/fyi/news/05/14/petting.zoo.ecoli/

CNN: [Children infected with E. coli at petting zoo, officials say](http://www.cnn.com/2000/HEALTH/children/11/08/ecoli.farm.ap/index.html):
http://www.cnn.com/2000/HEALTH/children/11/08/ecoli.farm.ap/index.html

CNN: [Nineteen children sickened - 1 E. coli case confirmed](http://www.cnn.com/2000/HEALTH/10/26/sick.pupils.ap/index.html):
http://www.cnn.com/2000/HEALTH/10/26/sick.pupils.ap/index.html

Eurosurveillance Weekly: [Infection Risks from Contact with Farm Animals and Poultry](http://www.goatworld.com/articles/infectionrisks.shtml):
http://www.goatworld.com/articles/infectionrisks.shtml

Journal Sentinel: [Suspected cases of E. coli multiply](http://www.jsonline.com/news/state/aug01/ecoli18081701a.asp): http://www.jsonline.com/news/state/aug01/ecoli18081701a.asp

Newfoundland & Labrador Agriculture: [Health Risks from Handling Animals \(1\): Livestock Owners](http://www.gov.nf.ca/agric/pubfact/Handling/Handling1.htm):
http://www.gov.nf.ca/agric/pubfact/Handling/Handling1.htm

Times Herald: [Health department blamed for delay in E. coli report](http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=1059706&BRD=1672&PAG=461&dept_id=33380&rft=6):
http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=1059706&BRD=1672&PAG=461&dept_id=33380&rft=6

Times Herald: [9 more E. coli cases suspected](http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=1063625&BRD=1672&PAG=461&dept_id=33380&rft=6):
http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=1063625&BRD=1672&PAG=461&dept_id=33380&rft=6

- 9) **Not everyone eats the same food.** Discussing types of food means drastically different things to different people. Especially in the nation's capital where there is a wide diversity of ethnic visitors and residents. In addition to the many cultural differences in food, many people are vegetarian for reasons such as health, religion, financial, and animal suffering.

Once the zoo starts discussing any behavior that people do as a generality, it runs the risk of alienating certain other groups of people.

- 10) **Promoting a political agenda.** The zoo did not originally intend on having this exhibit. Smithsonian Board of Directors Congressional Regent, Congressman Ralph Regula from Ohio, lobbied the reluctant zoo and then provided \$5 million for the exhibit. There are many real reasons why the DC National Zoo should decline this offer and not go forward with the exhibit. The flow of pedestrian traffic through it will be a huge problem for the zoo and long-term funding for exhibit upkeep, animal care, and staffing is an issue. And this is all in addition to the dangerously misleading information that will be passed on to the public.

There is no good that can come from this exhibit. The factory farming industry knows that it is getting harder for it to keep up a positive public image. This exhibit is a direct attempt to push their agenda and has nothing to do with public education. This exhibit would be so obviously biased that it wouldn't take long for the public (and media) to find the source of funding. **It would soon become obvious that the zoo's agenda had been influenced and bought by special interests and not influenced by public interests or furthering the mission of the zoo.** This would add additional unwanted negative publicity.

It's not too late to change direction. Some resources and time have already been spent, but all of these consequences were not thought about in the beginning. Since everyone at the zoo should have a shared vision of public education (per the zoo's mission and reason Congress established the zoo in 1889), surely the zoo would realize that accurate education is more important than going forward with something just because some resources and time have already been spent.

If the zoo were going to truthfully and accurately discuss all of these issues, then this exhibit would be applauded. But for political reasons, the unpleasantness of farming will be unmentioned.

Zoos are an institution professing to teach about natural animal behavior. There is nothing natural about animal behavior anywhere in the farming industry.

People cling to what they want to believe more so than what is truthful. People respect the DC National Zoo as an authority on animals. They will believe the zoo blindly. That is a huge responsibility. If the exhibit shows happy and well cared for animals, the public will go home and eat what they assume was a "happy and well cared for animal."

In the name of accurate public education about health issues, environmental issues, global hunger issues, and animal suffering, please take the time to go through the enclosed material in depth. The extreme brutality endured by farm animals throughout their lives, at auctions, during transportation as well as at slaughter cannot be glossed over just because they are inconvenient details and consequences that the zoo would prefer not to deal with in a children's exhibit. Understandably, the zoo wants to add an exhibit for kids, but it should not come at the sacrifice of accurate education. There are many types of exhibits that could be geared towards children and educate them accurately at the same time.

Best Regards,

Janet Deery
President
Animal Awareness