



Catholic Conference of Ohio

Understanding the Catholic Bishops of Ohio support for Issue 2

Issue 2 establishes a Livestock Care Standards Board in Ohio's Constitution. Like many social justice issues, there are differing sides and various shades of clarity. This is precisely why the bishops' materials include both the pro and con arguments on issue 2.

It is hoped that these comments regarding the rationale for such support will lead proponents and opponents to further dialogue and reflection. Certainly, should the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) secure an Ohio ballot initiative in 2010, many of the issues raised in the Issue 2 campaigns will again be reviewed, argued and debated by the bishops.

While concerns over Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) form a backdrop to Issue 2, perhaps the focus questions offered by the bishops provide the best framework. This is especially true of question 3: "Will creation of a livestock standards board within Ohio's constitution sufficiently ensure the humane treatment of livestock, food safety, environmental stewardship, and support for farm families?" At issue is the *value* of such a board. As the bishops clearly state, "Persons of good will may differ as to the specifics of this proposal."

Please know that the bishops studied and debated the pros and cons of this issue. In the end, they made a unanimous decision to support Issue 2. As the bishops state in their position, "There are many farm families in Ohio who responsibly and humanely provide food through confined livestock operations." Ohio has Catholic farm families who operate CAFOs. The Catholic Conference of Ohio has a rural life board, and most of these members, along with several bishops, have visited such farms. The bishops felt it was important to make this statement of support because too many groups have negatively painted CAFOs with too broad a stroke. There are responsible CAFOs and irresponsible CAFOs, just as there are responsible small operations and irresponsible small operations.

It might also be helpful to note that the Catholic Conference of Ohio did not agree with the moratorium statement on CAFOs made in 1998 by the National Catholic Rural Life board. The Ohio bishops issued their "Life on the Land" statement that same year. This statement framed the CAFO issue in a more "questioning" light by calling for public debate and dialogue that promotes communal solidarity. You can find this statement on our website, www.ohiocathconf.org.

In their statement on Issue 2, the bishops reflect upon the need for an appropriately regulated and enforced set of livestock care standards. This need has been stated in various Catholic rural life statements, including the 2003 U.S. Bishops statement, "For I was Hungry and You Gave Me Food." At present, Ohio does **not** have a uniform set of standards. Under the principle of *subsidiarity*, the bishops strongly support the need for knowledgeable Ohioans -- not outside interest groups -- to determine such standards.

Regarding the argument that the board will have too much power, the bishops conclude that section 4(B) of the amendment provides *sufficient* public oversight. The language under 4(B) states: “The Board shall have authority to establish standards governing the care and well-being of livestock and poultry in this state, subject to the authority of the General Assembly.”

The bishops also conclude that this livestock care standards board will serve an important and needed function in determining *appropriate* standards. On this topic, there are differing *perceptions* as to whether this board will promote the *common good* in their development of such standards. The bishops are hopeful that appropriate standards will be enacted. Should such a board be approved, the Catholic Conference of Ohio will continue to advocate strongly for the *common good*.

In summary, the bishops conclude that the benefits of establishing a livestock care standards board within Ohio’s constitution outweigh the negatives. This does not need to be your conclusion.

The following reflection is from one of our state’s diocesan rural life directors:

“Farm size alone is not the criterion, nor is confinement. Good stewardship is a better measure. Stewardship has certain characteristics that are applicable to and reproducible in *like-kinded* operations. They become the standard by which we measure our husbandry of our animals and our earth.

If such standards can exist, why can’t a board for developing and implementing them? Why can’t the State which has the power to make law have the power to create a mechanism that draws on the experience of farmers, scholars and regulators, community folks and neighbors in outlining the requirements of our care and custody of creation?”

Thank you for your concern and advocacy. It is hoped that any ongoing differences result in continued prayerful and respectful dialogue over this difficult, complex and emotional issue of safe, affordable and humanely produced food.



Ohio Ballot Issues

November 2009

The Catholic Conference of Ohio encourages voters to carefully consider the three statewide Issues that are on the November 3, 2009 ballot.

Issue 2

To Create the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board Constitutional Amendment

Issue 2 would require the state to create the *Livestock Care Standards Board* to prescribe standards for animal care and well-being. The standards are intended to maintain food safety, encourage locally grown and raised food, and protect Ohio farms and families.

The Board would establish standards after they considered agricultural best-management practices, biosecurity, disease prevention, animal morbidity/mortality data, food safety practices, and the protection of local, affordable food supplies.

The bi-partisan Board would be comprised of thirteen members with expertise in farming, animal care, and food safety issues. It would be chaired by the director of the state department that regulates agriculture.

Pro Arguments

- Issue 2 keeps control of agriculture under the guidance of Ohio experts, including family farmers, food safety experts, veterinarians and consumers.
- Seeks to address concerns that may surface in a possible 2010 Ohio constitutional ballot initiative that would make it a criminal offense to confine hens in certain cages, pigs in gestation crates, and calves in veal crates. Such an initiative passed in California in 2008.
- It is feared that such an Ohio initiative in 2010 will foster misinformation, harmfully disrupt livestock farms, artificially drive up the cost of animal products and restrict consumer choice and food access. The *Livestock Care Standards Board* will ensure that livestock confinement practices in Ohio are appropriately regulated and humane, thereby making future initiatives in this area less necessary.
- Many boards are currently authorized within the Ohio Constitution. Placements of boards within the Constitution reflect the importance of their mission, and need for nonpartisan actions. Such is the case for constitutionally creating this *Standards* board.

Con Arguments

- Issue 2 furthers the interests of agribusiness which supports this amendment to prevent certain animal care reforms proposed by national animal rights organizations.
- The proposed Livestock Board should not be in the State Constitution. Amending the Ohio Constitution should be reserved for significant issues that affect the rights of all Ohioans.

Church Teaching

In the Ohio Catholic bishops' statement, *Life on the Land* (1998), the bishops encourage each of us to listen to the needs and concerns of our state's farmers so that food security, environmental stewardship, just treatment of all in the agricultural system and the broadest participation of all Ohioans in the agricultural sector can be achieved.

In the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' statement, *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food* (2003), the bishops call for the careful regulation and monitoring of confined animal feeding so that environmental risks are minimized and animals are treated as creatures of God.

Focus Questions

1. Is Issue 2 needed and well conceived?
2. Does Issue 2 reflect a change that should be addressed in the state constitution (as opposed to an issue that ought to be addressed through the legislative process)?
3. Will the creation of a Livestock Standards Board within Ohio's constitution sufficiently ensure the humane treatment of livestock, food safety, environmental stewardship, and support for farm families?



Catholic Conference of Ohio Position

A voter's position on Issue 2 involves a prudential judgment where persons of good will may differ as to the specifics of this proposal.

While there is ongoing debate regarding livestock care standards, there are many farm families in Ohio who responsibly and humanely provide food through confined livestock operations.

Regardless of one's position on Issue 2, it is vital for Ohio to have an appropriately regulated and enforced set of animal care and safe food standards, while still assuring affordable and accessible food for all.

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio support passage of Issue 2.