

What If Consumers AREN'T Always Right?

You've heard it. Many times. *The consumer is always right.* And you dare not question that statement. Ever. Marketers live and die by that statement.

But what if, just what if, the consumer isn't always right? What if they are right based on the information they have? What if they don't have all the information and are making important food decisions based on lack of information? Especially when it comes to their food. Does it matter?

Yes, it matters

Because sometimes . . . information consumers don't have about how their food is raised or grown affects our entire food system. Let's take a look at the recent initiatives by the state of Massachusetts to outlaw the use of gestation stalls (gestation stalls are individual pens where sows are housed) as well as other animal welfare issues.

The new law in effect in Massachusetts

The new law will prohibit Massachusetts farmers from confining egg-laying hens, breeding pigs and calves raised for veal in spaces that prevent the animals from "lying down, standing up, fully extending its limbs, or turning around freely" — and the sale of products from animals confined in that way.

And it was passed overwhelmingly. 77.7% in favor, 22.3% against.

On the surface, this looks like a great decision and I probably would have voted for it if I was not a farmer. No question about it. This is a law for the benefit of animals, right? But it's only when you look deeper into the subject that you realize it's not that simple.

This bill will take effect in 2022 and will prohibit farmers in Massachusetts to raise animals in environments that will prevent them from lying down, standing up, fully extending its limbs or turning around freely. And in addition, the residents of Massachusetts will not be able to buy pork from these type of facilities either. Specifically for pigs, they are addressing gestation (individual) stalls. And this is the part where consumers don't have all the necessary knowledge about why gestation stalls are used.

Consumers are flooded with propaganda from organizations like HSUS (Humane Society of the United States). They take advantage of small farming states and press for these ballot initiatives that push their agenda--the agenda to significantly reduce and eliminate livestock agriculture.

Let me tell you a story

We have farmed for over 40 years and all 40 of those years we have raised pigs. We know and understand pigs. I always tell consumers there is NO perfect sow housing. NONE!

Housing them outdoors is not perfect.

Housing them in gestation stalls is not perfect.

Housing them in pens is not perfect.

Both the American Veterinarian Medical Association and American Association of Swine Practitioners have both approved these housing methods. Again, what is far more critical is how *they are taken care of. Care is more important - not how they are housed.*

Why do farmers use gestation stalls?

To put it bluntly, sows are mean. And they can be mean to each other and to caretakers. Because they are animals, they have a social hierarchical system they go through that determines who is "king sow." And this means attacking each other to injure or kill. And it's a terrible scene. *We know. Sows have died on our farm because of this.*

Farming decisions can't be based on human feelings.

Please take a couple minutes and watch this video to get a better sense of what I am talking about.

The day we put our sows into our newly finished gestation barn was a day we saw our animals content, calm and relaxed. They were now safe. They no longer had to fear for their lives by being attacked. In fact, research shows there are no increased stress hormones in sows housed in gestation stalls and if given a choice, 80+% of the sows will spend 80+% of their time in individual stalls.

Yes, there are other sow housing methods

I am not writing this to bash other methods to house sows. I am only telling you our story and the story of many other pig farmers. I truly believe farmers farm the way they know best, the knowledge, resources, and expertise available to them and we need to respect their methods. I agree there are farmers who can take care of their animals in other housing methods. Again, it's

not how they are housed, but *how well the animals are managed and taken care of*.

Why don't farmers just switch their housing methods?

Because it costs a lot of money. And who is going to pay for it? Right now, the price of pigs is below what it costs to raise them. No one is standing up and offering to pay for the additional costs to switch housing methods and yet consumers expect it and don't want to pay extra for their pork based on their preferences.

Conclusion

So even though consumers don't have the knowledge of how their food is raised or grown, marketers are not helping the cause. Consumer's ever-changing food preferences are affecting the entire food system and it's based on the little information they are given. I personally would like to see marketers step up to the plate and do their part--research the issue and tell the whole story without taking advantage of the uninformed. Unfortunately, I do not see that happening.

And as a farmer, it's frustrating as hell.

Additional sources:

[Why We Use Individual Gestation Stalls](#)

[The Use of Gestation Stalls](#)

[Farmer Use of Gestation Stalls](#)

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