

Proposition 12: California, Please Don't Tell Me How To Raise My Pigs

Some days I wonder what has become of our country? During the last election, many areas across the U.S. experienced record-breaking voting. Kind of exciting for me to see people were more engaged. Believe me, I am all for citizen participation. Not only were new candidates voted in, but there were a number of new ballot initiatives voted on. Some of those ballot initiatives just didn't make sense such as California's Proposition 12, a proposition addressing farm animals housing. The problem? Californians didn't have enough knowledge to make a good decision and as often as I have said, the only way our type of government works is if we have an educated electorate.

[After the election and the passing of Proposition 12](#), I couldn't help but think, "California, please don't tell me how to raise my pigs." Let's dig into this a bit deeper:

California Proposition 12 Specifics

California's Proposition 12 was a ballot initiative that asked it's voters to determine livestock animal standards:

ESTABLISHES NEW STANDARDS FOR CONFINEMENT OF SPECIFIED FARM ANIMALS; BANS SALE OF NONCOMPLYING PRODUCTS. INITIATIVE STATUTE.

Definition of the proposition: Establishes minimum requirements for confining certain farm animals. Prohibits sales of meat and egg products from animals confined in a noncomplying manner.

The proposition was asking its voters to determine how chickens, pigs, and dairy calves should be housed. But my question is, do the citizens of California have enough knowledge to vote on how livestock animals should be housed? Evidently, they feel they do.

So let's be honest, how many Californian's really studied this proposition? At first glance after reading the proposition, why wouldn't you vote for this? Sounds like a good thing. Who wants farm animals confined in *noncomplying manners*? No one, right? It's definitely a feel-good kind of vote. But what ended up happening is all Californians were given the title of "animal care experts."

But . . .

Who are the animal care experts?

Are Californians the animal care experts? Do they really know how to care for chickens, pigs and cows? Or are farmers the animal care experts?

And I will take this one step further, why was this on the ballot?

This would be no different than having each of us vote on specific medical procedures surgeons use. Do I have enough medical knowledge that I can tell a surgeon on what medical procedure they should use? I think not. I would NEVER want to vote on an issue like that. I acknowledge I don't have the knowledge and I am not the expert. But for some reason, California thinks they are animal care experts.

So how does Proposition 12 affect pig farmers?

Part of the ballot initiative talks about "noncomplying manner." For pigs, this specifically talks about the use of gestation stalls. You can [read about why pig farmers use gestations stalls](#), but I will say there is NO perfect sow housing. None. There are advantages and disadvantages of both gestation stalls and open pen housing. But this should be left up to the farmers to make the decision on what works best for them. Success in pig farming is dependent on how the pigs are managed and not as much on how they are housed. The bottom line – we should not be micromanaging farmers. Let's leave animal care decisions to the farmers and their veterinarians. Farming is not easy and should not be left to a yes or no vote at the ballot booth.

Now What?

My guess at this point is Proposition 12 will go to court. There is a (rightfully) concern this Proposition 12 affects the U.S. interstate commerce clause. I certainly hope it goes to the courts and is defeated.

Some people may think – why not change the pig housing so it matches what California is dictating? Most people don't realize the cost associated with changing housing methods, especially when it doesn't mean better care of the animals. Pig farmers do not want to go backward in animal care by being forced into changing their animal care methods. They don't want their hands tied based on someone who only has an ideological view of farming.

And if pig farmers have to comply with California's arrogance ways, the cost of food could go up significantly and there may be farmers that will just leave their profession. We as a nation, need to be really careful about what we are doing. It really comes down to, [Who Do You Want to Raise Your Bacon?](#)

So What Is The Solution?

Probably one of the most frustrating aspects to farming right now is the disconnect consumers have with those who grow and raise their food. That is precisely why I blog and advocate. I also work with [Ag in the Classroom](#), which allows educators to bring in ag-based lessons into their core curriculum subjects. It's imperative that we make a concerted effort into increasing ag literacy. In my opinion, it should be mandated in the schools.

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