



Polls indicate strong support for pen gestation for hogs

By ANDREA JOHNSON, For The Prairie Star

Two states have now banned the use of gestation stalls for sows - Florida and Arizona.

Floridians changed their constitution in 2002 to ban stalls. Caught off-guard, it was difficult for farm groups to know if a strong campaign against the ban would have changed voters' minds.

The story for the Nov. 7, 2006 election in Arizona was much different.

A strong campaign was run to oppose Proposition 204 calling for a ban on gestation sow stalls and veal crates.

The proposal amended Arizona's Revised Statutes by adding a new section entitled "relating to cruel and inhumane confinement of animals."

The amended law prohibits the confinement of sows during gestation as well as veal calves. Animals must be given enough room to turn around, lie down and extend limbs. The law takes effect in 2012.



Charlie Arnot

The proposition passed by 62 percent for the initiative vs. 38 percent against.

Charlie Arnot, president of CMA Consulting, a Kansas City, Mo.-based public relations firm, discussed the Arizona campaign with pork producers attending the National Pork Industry Forum in Anaheim, Calif.

As a public relations firm, CMA Consulting served as a consultant to the Arizona campaign fighting the ban.

The Campaign for Arizona Farmers and Ranchers sponsored and oversaw the campaign against Proposition 204.

Funding came from the American Veal Association, National Pork Producers Council, the Arizona Cattle Feeders Association, Arizona Pork Council, American Farm Bureau Federation, Arizona Farm Bureau Federation, Arizona Cattleman' Association and the United Dairymen of Arizona.

Copper State Consulting in Arizona provided day-to-day operations for the livestock coalition.

Those who were in favor of the ban spent \$1.7 million, while those who were against spent \$1.3 million, Arnot said.

Arizonans for Humane Farms sponsored Proposition 204 and received funding from the

Arizona Humane Society, the Humane Society of the United States, Farm Sanctuary and the Animal Defense League of Arizona.

"It was a very competitive, well-executed plan from both sides of the equation," said Arnot.

CMA Consulting's role involved strategic guidance as decisions were made on how the campaign would move forward. Arnot has developed a model for "pre-empting" a potential crisis, called Anticipatory Issues Management.

"By the time an issue reaches an initiative - where you're really dealing with something on a ballot - you have already reached a triggering event," he said. "You really can't use the Anticipatory Issues Management model. It really was more of a pure political campaign, asking how do you convince enough voters to vote with your side of the question."

The livestock coalition conducted polls in December 2005 - about 11 months before the election - to find out how the Arizona population might vote on this proposal.

Voters were asked, "How concerned are you about the treatment of farm animals raised to provide us the meat we buy in grocery stores?"

Ninety-four percent said they had some level of concern.

"That's not surprising," said Arnot. "If you were to ask people what they look for when they go to the grocery store to buy meat, milk and eggs, they don't volunteer these issues. They volunteer value, color, price, expiration dates and quality.

"When asked if these issues are important - they will say 'yes.'"

Consequently, groups like the Arizonans for Humane Farms are not drivers of behavior, but they can be de-railers, Arnot said. They can move consumers away from accepting modern farming operations, but are not that likely to move consumers toward appreciating today's livestock operations.

Consumers consistently say they want animals that are raised for food to be treated decently and humanely when they are alive - and farmers and ranchers also indicate this ethical belief.

Yet about two-thirds of consumers also say that farm animals raised for food do not have to be treated in the same way as household owners treat their pets. That's information that can be of use to livestock groups wanting to maintain their livelihood.

"There's an expectation that we meet our moral obligations to provide for the animal's well being, but a recognition these are farm animals - they are not household pets," said Arnot. "What people are looking for us to do is step into the gap and provide the assurance that we are treating animals humanely. We are providing for their well-being."

From the December 2005 poll, the livestock coalition determined that 78 percent of Arizona voters supported banning sow stalls and veal crates.

"We started in an enormous hole," said Arnot. "We followed that by doing some focus groups to try to figure out what the messages were - what were the things we could begin to communicate to move voters in our direction.

"The results were not positive," he continued. "As we showed gestation stalls, the feedback was negative. We couldn't find any way to help people understand the reason for gestation stalls and why they were in the best interest of the animal."

The campaign fighting Proposition 204 wound up with just one message - vote against the other side. Organizers decided to encourage citizens to cast their vote against out-of-state

activists coming into Arizona to impose their will.

They came up with the label "Hogwash."

The campaign fighting Proposition 204 ran a commercial saying the proposal was "Hogwash" in August 2006.

Polls indicated that after the commercials were run - the 78 percent favoring the proposition in December dropped to about 57 percent, with 27 percent against and 17 percent undecided.

"The final vote tally was 62 to 38," said Arnot. "We moved voters in our direction, but not enough. We only had one message - vote against them. We had no message to get people to vote for us."

The livestock coalition also decided to not let media tour Arizona hog facilities. Not allowing cameras into the facilities made the public and the media more interested in the subject, and they wondered why they couldn't see sows in gestation stalls.

Then an undercover farmer took some footage inside some barns. That's what the campaign used to reinforce Proposition 204.

"The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) claims to be the public policy experts in the animal welfare movement," said Arnot. "They have been involved or have led 25 state initiatives to date on all kinds of issues. Their messages are very mainstream, and they are not PETA."

Arnot said that he doesn't expect HSUS to work for any initiatives in 2007, but in 2008, they could be asking for bans of gestation stalls and veal crates in other states.

He thinks that states west of Missouri are prime candidates for initiatives dealing with animal welfare. Interestingly, Utah has passed legislation requiring any initiative dealing with animal welfare to pass by a two-thirds majority.

He suspects that Ohio, Missouri and Colorado are all states that may be at risk of seeing initiatives banning sow stalls, veal crates and possibly layer cages.

Arnot added that if producers want to keep gestation stalls for sows and veal crates for calves, it's going to take a sophisticated multi-message campaign to compete in the future.

"We have to have a message that gives the bell curve permission to believe that what we are doing is in the best interest of the animal - not in the best interest of the producer," Arnot said. "We have to determine if that's even possible by doing some heavy message testing."

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