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October 23, 2014

To: Editorial Board, Newark Star-Ledger

From: Ryck Suydam, President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ryck A. Suydam'.

Re: "The 'pig poll' may help Christie rediscover his humanity" (10/20/14)

Your recent editorial urging Governor Christie to sign into law the legislation to effectively prohibit the use of gestation crates in New Jersey is replete with misinformation and not-so-thinly-veiled swipes at livestock operators throughout the state. What's more, it completely ignores the question we all should be asking: why on earth is the New Jersey legislature even debating this matter in the first place?

To our knowledge, there are no high-intensity pig breeding operations in New Jersey where the use of side-by-side gestation crates is employed. The vast majority of New Jersey's pig farms are finishing operations, raising weaned piglets to a salable weight. If any of the few pig breeding operations in the state do elect to use these crates, it is typically done upon recommendation by a veterinary care expert to protect a pregnant sow for no more than a month's time at the end of the pregnancy.

Pig farms, like all other livestock operations in the state, are already fully-regulated by the Department of Agriculture's (NJDA) Humane Care of Domestic Livestock standards, standards duly-authorized by the legislature in 1997 and adopted in 2004. These standards, successfully upheld by the state Supreme Court, address all aspects of livestock care, including the targeted use of gestation crates when appropriate as a tool to promote sow health and safety.

It also bears mentioning that the standards include substantial penalty enforcement provisions and are subject to periodic review and re-adoption. To date, there have been no violations resulting from the inappropriate use of these crates, a testament not only to the efficacy of the standards, but also to the good animal husbandry practices routinely employed by the state's livestock operators.

If the opponents of gestation crates are so concerned about this practice, they should plead their case when the rules are readopted rather than try to sidestep the existing regulatory framework with one-off legislation.

As for the quips about this being driven by politics, we'd concede that this issue is being debated with an eye toward other states, but it's not the Governor's eye. Rather, we believe the reverse is true. The animal welfare groups promoting this wholly-unnecessary legislation here in New Jersey want to use us a springboard to put pressure on larger pig producing states.

This issue is very much a solution in search of a problem here in New Jersey. We simply don't have the type of agriculture that the bill seeks to inhibit. That's why the Governor responsibly vetoed the bill the last time around. He recognized that there is already a mechanism in place to adjudicate these issues under the guidance of NJDA's veterinary care experts. We for one hope he makes the same prudent decision this time and once again rejects this misguided legislation out-of-hand.

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