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ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURE ACTIVISTS: WHERE DO THEY COME FROM AND WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

WHO ARE ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURALISTS?

- ✘ Animal rightists
- ✘ Vegetarians and vegans
- ✘ Locavores (Alice Waters, Michael Pollan)
- ✘ Luddites (Small farm advocates (Wendell Berry), anti-GMO)
- ✘ Organic proponents (also anti-GMO)
- ✘ Radical environmentalists (industrial agriculture unsustainable)
- ✘ Fair traders and antiglobalists

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

- ✘ Younger than average
- ✘ Well educated (liberal arts, humanities)
- ✘ Women
- ✘ Caucasian
- ✘ Upper middle class
- ✘ Urban or suburban

PHILOSOPHY: POSTMODERNIST

- ✘ Ethical system: Moral rights
- ✘ Relativism (“Truth” is political)
- ✘ Radical democracy
- ✘ Existentialist (Gut feelings, not divine law)

HISTORICAL ROOTS

- ✘ Protest movements as old as history
- ✘ Counterculture movement of 1960s:
Establishment failed in 20th century
 - Two world wars, great depression
 - World poverty, hunger, disease
 - Vietnam War—failure of brightest & best
 - “Agriculture too important to be left to agriculturalists”

ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURIST GRIPES

- ✘ Food is too cheap (see Brian Walsh, *The high cost of cheap food*, *Time*, 2009)
- ✘ Food (and water) is toxic, tasteless, barren of nutrients, and contaminated with pathogens
- ✘ Food is produced too far from consumers
- ✘ Our agriculture is unsustainable
- ✘ Farmland is being lost to development and erosion
- ✘ Subtherapeutic antibiotic use on farm animals creates MRSA
- ✘ CAFO factory farms cruel to animals

CAFO FACTORY FARMS CRUEL TO ANIMALS?

✘ Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) source of Proposition 2 passed in California:

“It shall be a misdemeanor for any person to confine a pregnant pig, calf raised for veal, or egg-laying hen in a manner not allowing the animal to turn around freely, stand up, lie down, and fully extend its limbs.”

Passed by 2:1 majority in referendum

IMPLICATION OF PROP 2

- ✘ Raise production cost of eggs 26 % for “free barn” and 45 % for “free range” production
- ✘ If one state adopts, production goes to another state or nation (with lower standards?)

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS PROP 2

✘ Preempt:

Label production practice, let consumer vote with purchase

Educate: Get out early and often

Ohio: Formed livestock standards board

Michigan: “Caved” to HSUS. Take edge off worst features, i.e. 20 fold increase in “cage” size

ADVICE FOR AG LEGISLATORS

- ✘ Educate voters and make sensible policy reforms
- ✘ Beware of *plebiscite democracy* (the referendum)
(Our heritage is *representative democracy*)
 - Filter appeals for legislation
 - Avoid populist appeals: Simple, appealing, but wrong solutions to complex problems
- ✘ Utilize markets (e.g. labeling)
- ✘ Utilize science—but remain critical
- ✘ Utilize public goodwill towards agriculture