



## **No Need to Fight: Farmers and Activists Can Find Common Ground on Gestation Crates**



Patricia Langenfelder uses gestation crates on her Maryland farm and, if you believe her public statements, she isn't all that interested in hearing new ideas about how she could house her pregnant sows more humanely.

Langenfelder is part of a minority group in the Old Line State that uses gestation crates. Her farm is one of approximately three to five in the state that employ the 2x7 foot individual cages to house sows during their entire pregnancy—almost four months. These

crates are so cramped that the pigs literally cannot turn around in them, a confinement so constricting that The HSUS calls the crates "one of the most appalling abuses in industrial confinement systems."

Yet, Langenfelder, vice president of the Maryland Farm Bureau, defended her right to use gestation crates at a recent hearing before a Maryland Senate committee, only days before the full state Senate narrowly defeated a bill to give pregnant sows more room. She explained that her family has been farming for three generations, and that she personally found it "offensive" that someone with less experience should tell her how to keep her 300 sows.

For all her passionate rebellion, however, Langenfelder's arguments are rather common among farmers. The litany of industrial farmers is almost standardized: Animal activists are not farmers and don't understand how the business really works. They don't know what they're talking about. They don't have any right to tell real farmers how to run their operation.

But perhaps clouded by her own indignation, Langenfelder misses a larger point in the give-and-take between farmers and animal activists: There's a way for each party to find a common ground, where business and animal welfare go hand-in-hand.

**Take David Smith for example. Smith is a farmer, a retired lieutenant colonel with the U.S. Army, and an electronic systems marketer with Raytheon. His 67-acre Springfield Farm, north of Baltimore, has been in the family since the 1600s. He direct-markets to consumers and restaurants, and has seen a sizable increase in his business every year.**

**And he doesn't believe in gestation crates.**

**Instead, every year, Smith purchases between 24-30 weaned pigs from local farms that either use movable outdoor housing or indoor group housing where the gestating sows can move around.**

**Once on the Springfield Farm, the pigs are housed outdoors in large pens, where they can interact and exhibit their natural behaviors. What's more, Smith does not use hormones, antibiotics, or chemicals to raise the animals on his farm, which also includes chickens, ducks, geese, quail, turkeys, cows, goats, lambs, pigs and rabbits.**

**In fact, when it comes to his farm, Smith has nothing to hide, unlike some factory farms across the nation, which aggressively protect their privacy. Smith regularly invites the public to visit and see his farming techniques first hand. Indeed, The HSUS has taken members to Springfield Farm to show them an example of "sustainable agriculture" at work.**

**Like Langenfelder, Smith also testified at the Maryland Senate committee hearing, though the final outcome didn't favor the sustainable farmer. The bill, based on a Florida initiative that Sunshine State voters passed in 2002, was narrowly defeated by the Maryland Senate, 22-25. Yet the tight vote showed that the issue of farm animal confinement is getting the attention of the public and legislators.**

### **More to Come**

Legislators in several other states, in fact, have wrestled with the idea of gestation crates and whether they should be banned. California and Hawaii, for instance, have considered such bills. So did Florida's legislators—though when they did not enact a gestation crate bill, the public stepped in and gathered enough signatures to place an initiative on the November 2002 ballot. The initiative, which called for an amendment to the state constitution to mandate that pregnant sows be given enough room to turn around, passed and is now law in Florida.

In a way, politicians are just beginning to catch up with public sentiment. In a 2003 poll of 612 Iowans, David Hill of Hill Research Consultants found that 73% agreed that Iowa voters should be concerned about the humane treatment of animals raised for food. In addition, 77% said it is likely they would buy pork products from food companies whose suppliers raise and process their hogs only under humane and environmentally sound conditions. Not incidentally, Iowa is the top pork-producing state in the nation, where a whopping 91% of the land is used for agriculture.

Of course, both sides of the gestation crate issue—the Patricia Langenfelders and the David Smiths—like to use scientific studies to bolster their case. Both also use real-life examples to back up their arguments. But in the end, both scientific and anecdotal arguments can't overshadow the large object looming in the background: the ethical issue of gestation crates.

The HSUS and a growing segment of the public say that a pig is a living, breathing creature with needs that we should respect. Turning around in a crate is just one of those needs. That is not too much to ask. So, if and when the issue ever pops up in your state—and given the public clamor over gestation crates, it will—make sure to ask your legislators to grant these concessions to pregnant sows.

The Humane Society of the United States

[http://www.hsus.org/farm\\_animals/factory\\_farms/no\\_need\\_to\\_fight\\_farmers\\_and\\_activists\\_can\\_find\\_common\\_ground\\_on\\_gestation\\_crates.html](http://www.hsus.org/farm_animals/factory_farms/no_need_to_fight_farmers_and_activists_can_find_common_ground_on_gestation_crates.html)