

SENATE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL CONCERNS
MINUTES OF MEETING
MAY 1, 2006

[In these minutes: Proxy Voting, Caged Versus Cage-Free Eggs]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Ken Heller, chair, Joseph Marchesani, Peter Hiniker, Elizabeth Richardson, Greg Schooler, Julie Sweitzer, Amelious Whyte, David Fox, Craig Hassel, Catherine Jordan, Ajay Skaria, Mani Subramani, David Gysbers, Mira Reinberg

REGRETS: Jennifer Oliphant, Todd Tratz, Richard Lidstad, Katherine Fennelly, Christopher Barrett

ABSENT: Benton Schnabel, Nick Bengtson, Samantha Butts, Reid Johnson

OTHER: Deepa Mekala

GUESTS: Collin Bonde, Karen DeVet, Ramona Ilea, Jacquie Jacob, Donny Mansfield, Leslie O'Leary, Marguerite Pappaioanou, Laurie Scheich

I). Professor Heller called the meeting to order.

II). Members unanimously voted in favor of each of the three proxy resolutions below:

1. Continental Airlines – Affirm Political Nonpartisanship
2. Southern Company – Report on Political Donations and Policy
3. Visteon Corporation – Review/Report on Human Rights Policy

III). Professor Heller stated that the remainder of today's meeting would be spent continuing the committee's discussion of the caged versus cage-free egg issue. He then called on Dr. Jacquie Jacob and asked that she introduce herself. Dr. Jacob indicated that she is with the Department of Animal Science, specializing in poultry. She has a 75% extension appointment and works with all areas of poultry production with the exception of commercial turkeys. Professor Heller encouraged members to ask Dr. Jacob questions concerning the caged versus cage-free egg issue. Discussion highlights included:

- Are free-range chickens more susceptible to contracting Avian Flu than caged chickens? Dr. Jacob noted that there is no legal definition of "free-range". With this said, if what is meant by free-range is that chickens are roaming free outdoors, then, yes, these birds would be more susceptible to contracting many different diseases, including avian flu since it is carried by wild birds. Although Minnesota has had episodes of Low Path Avian Influenza (LPAI) fairly frequently, Minnesota does not have the Asian type of Avian Influenza. None of

the Avian Influenza viruses that have caused problems in Minnesota have been transmitted to humans.

- Can people contract Avian Influenza by eating an egg that has not been cooked thoroughly? People can become sick from eating poultry meat or eggs from birds infected with Avian Influenza. Proper cooking of eggs and chicken will reduce this risk. Avian Flu withstanding, there is always a risk of Salmonella enteritis in eating chicken or eggs that are not properly cooked, and the Avian Influenza virus is killed at temperatures lower than those required to kill Salmonella. One in 20,000 eggs produced is reported to have some level of Salmonella enteritis infection.
- Are chickens whose eggs are certified humane cage-free allowed access to the outdoors? Standards for certified humane cage-free egg-laying hens stipulate that these hens are not required to go outdoors, but this is not the same as saying they are required to be indoors.
- Dr. Jacob reported that the European Union (EU) recently concluded a study, which uncovered that:
 - Although battery cages will be banned in Europe in 2012, most egg producers in Europe have not yet converted to cage-free facilities because they do not have a viable alternative yet.
 - After comparing various types of egg production management systems, they concluded that the EU directive to ban caged-layer systems, which was meant to improve the physiological welfare of laying hens, appears to in fact increase animal health and food safety concerns, at a huge economical cost to the producers. As a result, the EU is reconsidering its ban on caged egg facilities. For those EU producers that have converted, some have chosen the housing with outdoor access system while others have chosen confined aviary systems. Before making any final decisions about their egg laying facilities, countries like Australia and the United States are waiting to see what happens in the European Union.
- Does cage-free and free-range mean the same? No, but neither has a legal definition. Cage-free simply means the birds are not kept in cages (typically this refers to birds allowed to roam free within a chicken house – also known as floor reared or free-roaming). Free-range just means the birds have access to the outdoors; it does not mean that they actually use the outdoors. In a true free-range system, the birds are kept outdoors during the day (weather permitting) and come into a shelter at night.
- Which egg production method, cage-free or free-range is responsible for increased food safety concerns e.g. increased bacteria? Both systems have been linked to increased bacterial contamination primarily because of floor eggs, (eggs not laid in the nest boxes provided) which have been contaminated by fecal matter.
- In Dr. Jacob's opinion, a cage-free facility is less humane than the current battery cage systems used in modern egg production facilities. In a cage-free environment, hens must constantly re-establish their pecking order as they move throughout the barn on the floor, which, according to Dr. Jacob, is very stressful.

In a caged facility, once hens have established their pecking order it is respected and maintained. While agreeing that some egg producers have put too many chickens in a single cage, Dr. Jacob noted that there are reasons for putting chickens in cages. The floor system increases the likelihood of cannibalism, parasites, and floor eggs. With respect to floor eggs, good producers will not allow these contaminated eggs into the food system, but a few poor producers do. Dr. Jacob noted that contaminated eggs can ruin a batch of eggs as they are more likely to spoil.

- What is the most humane facility for egg production? In Dr. Jacob's opinion, an aviary system (multi-level barn) is the most humane egg production facility. The aviary system allows birds to move around, while not getting pecked on as much as in the floor system.
- What is the average density in a cage-free barn egg production facility? According to Dr. Jacob, certified humane, cage-free standards specify an allowable density of 1.5 square feet per hen, which is quite generous. Or, if the facility has perches, then the allowable density is 1.2 square feet. This compares to colony-caged facilities where the United Egg Producers (UEP - <http://www.unitedegg.org/>) recommends hens be given 64 square inches of space.
- Is it possible to determine whether caged hens are 'happy'? Dr. Jacob pointed out that it is very difficult to determine if a hen is 'happy'. The two primary ways to measure a bird's level of 'happiness' are to observe its behavior under different conditions, and to measure blood hormone levels, but this measurement, Dr. Jacob would argue, is somewhat stressful for the bird and may not be a valid measurement of 'happiness' or stress. Dr. Jacob argues that caged facilities are not inhumane based on behavioral studies. Behavior studies have been conducted to determine how much cage space a chicken is willing to work for, and this has been used to set cage densities. Dr. Jacob reminded the committee that chickens are flock birds and like to be close to other chickens.
- Are caged egg facilities designed to maximize cage comfort for the chickens or to maximize egg production? Dr. Jacob noted that these two options are not necessarily mutually exclusive because healthier and 'happier' chickens lay more eggs. Many of the layer cage manufacturers have improved their cage designs dramatically over the past few years. Additionally, many producers are rethinking the density of their cages. In the past most producers focused solely on profit, but now, the good producers, which represent a majority of producers, are thinking about the humaneness of their facilities as well.

At this time, several other guests joined the meeting: Karen DeVet, UDS; Laurie Scheich, Associate Vice President for Auxiliary Services; Dr. Marguerite Pappaioanou, Division of Epidemiology and Community Health in the School of Public Health; Collin Bonde, Residential Housing Association President; Donny Mansfield, Compassionate Action for Animals representative; Leslie O'Leary, Compassionate Action for Animals representative; Ramona Ilea, UDS Advisory Committee representative. Following introductions, the committee resumed its discussion around the caged versus cage-free egg issue. Discussion highlights included:

- Based on information received at the April 3rd meeting, the committee was left with the impression that caged facilities are inhumane compared to cage-free facilities, is this correct? Dr. Jacob stated that in her opinion this is not true, but acknowledged that others have dissenting opinions. She added that neither system is perfect; each has its flaws.
- How common a problem is cannibalism among chickens? Dr. Jacob stated that she receives a lot of calls from free-range and cage-free egg producers having problems with cannibalism, but it is hard to quantify the level of cannibalism in different production systems because not a lot of data is kept on small flock producers. The number one problem in most free-range systems that Dr. Jacob has visited is cannibalism.
- Is cannibalism a bigger problem in caged systems than in a free-range system? Dr. Jacob stated that once the pecking order is established in a caged system the hens tend not to peck as much. She added that many free-range producers also use beak trimming, a process of blunting the beak to deal with feather pecking or cannibalism problems.
- What is a floor egg? Dr. Jacob stated that a floor egg is an egg laid on the floor rather than in a nest box. The purpose of the nest box is to separate the egg from the hen as soon as possible. Hens need to be trained to use nest boxes properly.
- Dr. Jacob was asked to comment on the forced molting process that was mentioned at the April meeting. She noted that most commercial operations induce a molt usually once or twice in the life of a flock. This process allows the hen's productive life to be extended since after a year of production it is not economical to maintain a flock because the cost of what they are eating is more than the income generated by the eggs they are laying. If producers do not molt their hens, these birds need to be gotten rid of and replaced by a new flock of hens. Once hens go through a molt, they generally lay for another six to seven months.
- Are there physical or psychological consequences to inducing a molt? A molt is meant to mimic what naturally occurs in nature. If hens are left in a flock they will go into a molt on their own. Molting hens have different nutritional requirements than non-molting hens. Therefore, it is much easier to meet the nutritional requirements of, for example, 100,000 hens, if they all molt in close time proximity to each other. It would be impossible to modify the diet of each hen if they were to molt on their own time schedules. In the past, molting was induced by withdrawing feed for a short period of time, thus putting the entire flock out of production. There is a lot of research looking at other methods of inducing the molting process. These include using diets containing levels of nutrients that will not sustain egg production or by modifying the amount of light the hens receive. Most egg producers have developed their own non-feed withdrawal method of inducing a molt in their flocks.
- How are certified organic hens raised? Dr. Jacob stated that certified organic egg producers must meet a series of conditions set by the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). For example, the hens must be fed certified organic feed (ingredients cannot have been grown with the use of pesticides or chemical fertilizers), they cannot use de-worm medication, the hens must have access to the

- outdoors with encouragement to go outside among other criteria. There are not a lot of certified organic egg producers in Minnesota. While several farms may raise their hens organically, they are not certified organic, because the process to become certified can be quite expensive for small farmers.
- Dr. Jacob was asked whether her "ideal" egg producing system would be a caged facility with larger cages. She replied that her ideal system is an aviary system. In her opinion, the aviary system is the most humane, while still being economical.
 - Why are there so few aviary systems (one in the United States that Dr. Jacob is aware of)? Dr. Jacob stated that she attributes this to the fact that cage manufacturers are not promoting this type of system as much as they could and also because of the cost. Existing poultry facilities would be difficult, if not impossible, to retrofit into an aviary system. An important advantage of the caged system is in-line processing, which allows eggs to be shipped within hours of being laid. Engineers have not been able to devise a process, which would allow for similar monitoring of the lines in an aviary system.
 - What is the nutritional quality of eggs between different production systems? Dr. Jacob stated that as long as the hens are receiving a nutritionally adequate diet, there are no nutritional differences between eggs from the different production systems. Egg quality research, however, has revealed that the fresher the egg, the higher the internal quality of the egg. Field research has shown that conventional in-line processing methods are able to deliver fresher eggs with lower bacterial contamination and higher egg interior quality. Niche market eggs, on the other hand, are typically produced on small farms without their own processing facilities and they need to be transported from the farm to the processing plant. Egg pickup tends to be 2 – 3 times per week so the eggs are older when they reach the retail outlets. This does not mean niche market eggs are bad, but simply older.

Next, Laurie Scheich and Karen DeVet reported on discussions UDS has been involved in around this topic. The Twin Cities campus' annual egg volume for use in both retail and residential hall facilities was provided to members. On an annual basis the Twin Cities campus consumes 4,000 cases of liquid eggs, 315 cases of whole, fresh eggs and 970 cases of whole peeled eggs.

The request to have UDS use cage-free eggs was first brought to the attention of UDS last summer as an informal inquiry on behalf of representatives from Compassionate Action for Animals. Then, in October 2005, Compassionate Action for Animals asked the UDS Advisory Committee to formally consider the use of cage-free eggs in all on-campus dining facilities. In November, GAPSA, COGS and MSA all considered resolutions recommending that UDS adopt the use of cage-free eggs in all its facilities. Both GAPSA and COGS passed their resolutions, while MSA tabled its resolution citing the need to receive more information. In February 2006, the UDS Advisory Committee held a forum around the cage-free egg issue. At the conclusion of the forum, the UDS Advisory Committee voted to implement the use of cage-free eggs in all dining facilities on campus. It was decided that the next step would be to take the UDS Advisory Committee recommendation to the Residential Hall Association (RHA) for consideration.

The biggest impact of this program would be to those residing in residence halls. RHA passed a resolution supporting the use of cage-free eggs in the University's retail locations, but, due to the potential cost impact to the residential meal plan, RHA requested that any potential rate increases be directed toward other service enhancements such as extended service hours, etc. Finally, in April, MSA reconsidered its cage-free egg resolution, but did not pass it.

At this time, UDS does not have a source for cage-free whole peeled eggs. The UDS supplier is SYSCO Minnesota, who has been actively looking for a source of cage-free eggs, but, to date, no vendor for whole peeled eggs has been identified.

Other UDS initiatives mentioned by Ms. DeVet include:

- On a very preliminary basis, UDS has contacted the Department of Animal Science to discuss if it would be possible to purchase whole fresh eggs locally produced on the St. Paul campus.
- Efforts to expand the use of local products.
- Exploration and use of organic produce.
- Expand the use of "fair trade" products, specifically focusing on coffee.

Points brought up during the discussion were:

- What is the timeline for implementing the use of cage-free eggs at retail sites on campus? According to Ms. DeVet, this depends on the product's availability among other factors. Again, no source has been found for whole peeled eggs.
- What producers have been contacted for liquid eggs, whole fresh eggs and whole peeled eggs? All UDS purchasing is done through SYSCO Minnesota, who is making these inquiries on behalf of the University. Ms. DeVet indicated that she did not have a list of the vendors contacted by SYSCO.
- Dr. Pappaioanou stated that the resolution before the committee is based on the premise that the use of cage-free eggs is more humane. Today's discussion, which has brought forward food quality and other issues related to cage-free egg production, suggests the whole argument behind this resolution should be revisited.
- Compassionate Action for Animals representative Donny Mansfield noted that a number of faculty at Animal Science Departments in universities across the U.S., Canada and Europe, as well as some veterinarians contributed to the development of the certified humane cage-free egg production standards. In addition, he noted that well-maintained cage-free facilities do not have problems with cannibalism. There is disagreement with Dr. Jacob's position on cage-free facilities. Also, the Humane Society supports the use of certified humane cage-free eggs.
- Dr. Pappaioanou commented that it is extremely difficult to make evidence-based decisions on this issue. As Dr. Jacob pointed out, there are many different production systems, which vary in egg quality, food safety and with different cost implications.
- Ramona Ilea, UDS Advisory Committee member, noted that groups on campus that had prolonged discussions around this issue all voted in favor of using certified humane cage-free eggs at the University's retail locations. Certified

humane cage-free production has higher standards than cage-free egg production facilities, and, therefore, do not face many of the same problems that cage-free producers encounter. Michael Foods Inc., who SYSCO has contacted regarding supplying cage-free eggs, does not produce certified humane cage-free eggs. Therefore, contracting with Michael Foods to supply cage-free eggs would not solve the problem. She added that 80 schools have converted or are converting to the use of certified humane cage-free eggs.

- In response, Dr. Jacob stated that she has repeatedly asked for the list of schools that have moved to certified humane cage-free eggs, but has not been provided with this information. While Ms. Ilea believed she had provided this information to Dr. Jacob, she agreed to do so again. Dr. Jacob added that there have been universities that have switched to cage-free eggs, only to switch back. Neither certified humane cage-free egg production systems nor caged egg production systems are perfect.
- Dr. Pappaioanou recently spoke with a veterinarian at Michael Foods who extended an invitation to interested members of the University community to tour their facility of which they are very proud. Another factor is that many cage-free facilities are small and cannot afford to administer vaccination programs, and conduct health surveillance programs. For example, Salmonella vaccines come in a vial that would vaccinate 10,000 birds; therefore, small farms would be less likely to vaccinate their birds against Salmonella than larger facilities. The variability between different production companies plays an important role in food safety.
- A member stated that the proposed resolution, as currently drafted, mandates the use of certified humane cage-free eggs by UDS. This fails to give consumers a choice to decide for themselves. Should UDS make this choice for people or should consumers be given the option to choose for themselves?
- Is SYSCO trying to find a source for the University's request for cage-free eggs from certified humane cage-free egg producers, or simply cage-free egg producers? Ms. DeVet stated that she would need to clarify this because SYSCO's initial efforts in this regard were done prior to these specific resolution requirements.
- How does the University compare in terms of its consumption of eggs to other entities in the state? If the University is one of the larger egg consumers in the state this should influence its role and responsibilities relative to this issue. Ms. DeVet is confident that SYSCO would be willing to provide this information on a percentage basis. She added that if the University decides to purchase cage-free eggs, its decision to do so would undoubtedly influence other universities to move in the same direction. Dr. Pappaioanou added that some of the larger egg consumers such as Burger King and McDonald's are moving towards lower density facilities, (although not cage-free) while maintaining concern for food safety and veterinary medical care, which a caged system provides.
- Dr. Pappaioanou added that if birds are encouraged to be outside, with no barriers to droppings from migratory wild birds, they will be exposed to Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza viruses.

- Does UDS view itself as having a role as a stimulus within the state for better agricultural practices, or does it simply react to pressure? Ms. Scheich stated both apply to UDS's purchases. An example of UDS's partnership with SYSCO and ARMARK was used to illustrate how they are working together to identify sources of sustainable food products, and prioritizing how these products are purchased.
- According to Ramona Ilea Michael Foods, from whom the University purchases its eggs, is one of the worst egg producing facilities in the country. It is not UEP certified, and is not concerned whatsoever with animal welfare. Dr. Pappaioanou disagreed with that assessment of Michael Foods, and strongly encouraged interested members of the committee to visit multiple egg producing facilities and talk with their veterinary staff in order to understand the issues. Before denouncing Michael Foods or other vendors it is important to examine their product, and learn about their mortality rate, and egg-production facilities as well as the care they give their animals. Karen DeVet added that Michael Foods packages for SYSCO, and SYSCO requires a minimum of 80% of the eggs contained in their liquid packages to be UEP certified.
- Dr. Jacob noted that in the University's quest to become one of the top three public research universities in the world, it should use its own research to inform its purchases.
- Mr. Mansfield reported that the European Food Safety Authority reviewed all available scientific studies involving food safety risks in different production systems, and found that properly managed cage-free flocks had no higher rate of dirty, cracked or otherwise downgraded eggs than caged flocks.
- To establish humane treatment of animals and food safety, there is more variability in the operation of individual facilities that produce eggs than the type of production (e.g. certified humane cage-free versus caged or organic egg production).
- There clearly exists a difference of opinion between what constitutes humane treatment of animals.

At the end of the discussion, there was no clear opinion of the committee on this issue. The committee was cognizant of the importance of humane treatment of animals, the need for food safety, the importance of the University supporting humane and safe food production, and the need to support local food producers.

IV). Hearing no further business, Professor Heller adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey
University Senate