

Swede deal for animals

Sweden's social engineering schemes and smothering welfare system usually leave me cold, but, for once, the Swedes have done us all proud. Last summer, Sweden began implementing Western Europe's most aggressive programs to protect the rights of barnyard animals.

European consumers, it should be noted, are far more sensitized to the plight of farm animals than North Americans, and to the need to protect the quality of food. Sweden's new law calls for chickens, cattle and pigs to be set free from the horrible conditions imposed on them by factory farming. These include intensive crowding, inability to move, constant tethering and severe stress.

Swedish farm animals will no longer be forced into tiny boxes and made to produce until they die of exhaustion.

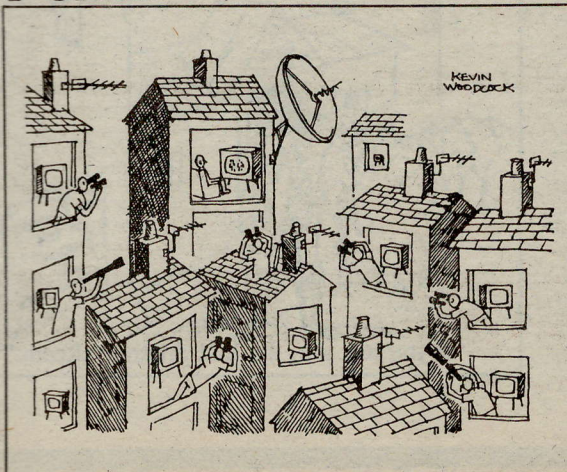
The law also bans use of hormones and antibiotics, both of which are widely used in North America. Hormones produce faster growth while antibiotics lessen the spread of infection among the jammed-together animals. North American consumers ingest large amounts of these powerful drugs through their food, a risk that has long worried the medical profession.

Cattle are to be assured adequate grazing space. Pigs can no longer be tightly penned but must have sleeping and eating space. Chickens will now have to be let out of their cages and allowed to run around.

Food lovers are also welcoming the new Swedish law. Animals that move about naturally produce much better tasting food. Anyone who doubts this has only to compare a free-range chicken with one of the industrial chickens sold in supermarkets. Caged chickens, in spite of antibiotics, teem with dangerous salmonella bacteria, a major source of food poisoning. They are often soaked in bleach to prevent them from turning green.

Sweden's farm animals owe moos, oinks and clucks of thanks to a fine lady, Astrid Lindgren. Using all her skills as a best-selling author of children's books, she managed to shame and browbeat the Swedish government into quick action—and to make other Europeans sit up and take notice.

Punch



**ERIC
MARGOLIS**



The animal rights movement is already gathering steam in Europe. To date, however, most of its attention has focused on stopping the use of mammals for scientific testing or banning imports of baby seal skins from Canada. Sweden's animal rights law will likely inspire quick enactment of similar legislation in the European community.

Some readers may recall that I wrote about this same issue during my recent visit to the Soviet Union. Even in the land of collective farms, where animals are state property, concern over their dreadful mistreatment and neglect is fast rising. Animal rights is suddenly a significant issue in Soviet society.

Sadly, the same cannot be said for North America. At least not about the plight and suffering of farm animals. People don't like to think about hideous living conditions or the terrible dying conditions of farm animals. In our age of hi-tech electronics, there's something ugly and disturbingly primitive about caging living creatures and then eating them. I'm no vegetarian, but the thought troubles me. At least I've stopped eating veal after reading about how calves are wrenched away from their mothers, caged in boxes, starved into mineral deficiencies, and kept in the dark.

We North Americans have not yet followed Europe's lead for two reasons.

First, most of our consumers lack the Europeans' sophistication for food and their demand for quality. This, however, is changing as people discover that what you cook is even more important than how you cook it.

Second, because farm lobbies in the U.S. and Canada are much too politically powerful. Besides soaking national treasuries for a galaxy of subsidies, farmers have blocked efforts to reduce the massive use of pesticides, fertilizers and drugs that appear to be a major cause of human cancers.

Getting farmers to stop poisoning the environment and to free their animals from filthy cages is going to be difficult. Doing so will cost money, increase labor costs and lower output. Farmers will do their best to terrorize weak-kneed politicians into sidetracking any such sensible health and humanitarian programs.

But, as Astrid Lindgren showed, a single lady clad in the armor of right can sometimes work miracles. We don't, alas, have her but there are enough consumers here concerned about their health and basic human decency to force action from our politicians—who'd dearly like to duck this explosive issue.

Don't let them. Our duty as human beings is to protect the meek, voiceless creatures who can't protect themselves. Skol to Sweden!