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Brief summary for the NET of several U.S. farm animal welfare polls conducted in the last decade

General:

A May 2003 Gallup poll found that “Americans support passing strict laws concerning the treatment of farm animals, by a 62% to 35%” margin. In addition, “women are 14 percentage points more likely than men to support strict laws for the treatment of farm animals. . . .” (69% of women supported the statement, while 55% of men did.) More Democrats supported passing strict laws concerning the treatment of farm animals than Republicans (67% of Democrats supported the statement, while 53% of Republicans supported it.)

An October 2003 Zogby poll found that 52% of Americans identify themselves as concerned about “the treatment of farm animals raised for food consumption.” By a significant margin—82% to 14%—respondents agreed that “there should be effective laws that protect farm animals against cruelty and abuse,” but by a similar margin, 71% to 20%, they agreed that “in general, farm animals are fairly treated in the United States.” As well, 72% believe that “farms should be inspected by government inspectors to ensure that laws to protect animals from cruelty are being followed.” Nearly half (44%) of Americans believe “there are effective federal and state laws in the United States that protect the welfare of farm animals,” while more than a quarter (26%) didn’t know, and 31% found that statement false. By a margin of 66% to 21%, respondents found it “unacceptable” to exempt common agricultural practices from state cruelty laws.

An April 2004 Market Directions poll found that 81% of Americans believe that farmers “are concerned about the well-being of their animals” and 76% believe farmers “care about the environment.” While 87% of respondents believe that “farm vets” are a credible source of information about the treatment of farm animals, only 29% believe the same about “animal activists.” 31% of respondents reported that they’re willing to pay 5% more for “humane” animal products, while 23% would pay 10% more, and 11% would pay 20% more.

A January 2005 Ohio State University poll found that 81% of Ohioans believe that “the well-being of farm animals is just as important as the well-being of pets,” and that 75% believe “farm animals should be protected from feeling physical pain.” By a margin of 47% to 18%, respondents agreed with the statement that “increased regulation of the treatment of farm animals is needed.” 43.1% of respondents claim they’re willing to pay 10% more “humane” animal products, while 12.4% claim a willingness to pay 25% more, with 40.6% not willing to pay more at all.

A series of Decision Research focus groups conducted in July 1999 led the pollster to recommend that humane groups focus more on inhumane farming methods than on slaughter, that vegetarianism not be a part of humane farm animal treatment campaigns, and that humane groups and environmental groups work more closely together on the issue.

Pork, egg, and veal-specific polls:

A 2004 Golin/Harris poll found that 56% of consumers believe egg producers treat their animals humanely, while 30% believe the same of pork producers and only 19% for veal producers. As well, 56% of consumers “agree with the need for government regulation to ensure animal welfare, even if it means food will cost more in the grocery store.” While 45% of consumers find that caging laying hens is “not healthier & safer,” another 32% were unable to decide and only 23% thought it is “healthier & safer.”

A May 2005 Decision Research poll of Arizona voters found that by a margin of 62% to 33%, voters say they would pass an initiative that banned the confinement of livestock in enclosures that don’t allow animals to turn around freely. When asked about the same measure, but worded to include turning around *and* freely extending

their limbs, respondents would pass the measure by a 68% to 26% margin. If the measure were restricted to apply *only* to veal calves, it would pass by a 66% to 28% margin. If it were restricted to apply *only* to sows, it would pass by a 67% to 27% margin. If it were restricted to apply *only* to laying hens, it would pass by a 59% to 34% margin. Participants were never asked how they would vote if the measure applied to all three categories of animals. Huge majorities, 78% to 20% in the case of laying hens, and 74% to 23% in the case of both calves and sows, believe that these animals should have the ability to turn around and freely extend their limbs, even if it means higher costs for the industry. The message that most people identified with was that it is “cruel and inhumane” to confine farm animals without the ability to turn around and freely extend their limbs.

A September 2000 Zogby poll found that 86.2% of Americans agree that “crowding 8-10 chickens in cages, about the size of an open newspaper, so tightly that they cannot stretch their wings” is “unacceptable.”

A July 1997 Decision Research poll of Oregon voters found that voters would support an initiative by a margin of 75% to 19% mandating that farm animals have enough room to “turn around and stretch their limbs.” If the initiative were restricted *only* to calves, the margin was 73% to 23%; when restricted *only* to sows, the margin was 72% to 23%; when restricted *only* to laying hens, the margin was 61% to 31%. Respondents were never asked how they would vote if the measure applied to all three categories of animals. However, they were asked if they thought cages/crates that prevent calves, sows *and* laying hens from turning around and stretching their limbs should be illegal, or only if cages/crates for *some* of those animals should be illegal. 60% thought it should be illegal for all three categories of animals, 13% for none of them, 16% for *some* of them, and 11% undecided.

An April 2003 Hill Research poll of California voters produced several interesting findings. The most relevant: Voters would support a measure to limit the “cruel confinement or tethering of pigs during pregnancy” by a margin of 49% to 32%. When mention was made of it being a “misdemeanor & minor enforcement & incarceration costs,” the margin became 44% to 38%.

A January 2003 Hill Research poll of Iowa voters found that by a margin of 65% to 25%, respondents favored a “moratorium on new large hog farms in Iowa while effects are being studied.”

A July 2000 Hill Research poll of Florida voters found that they would support a “limitation on pig confinement” on the ballot by a margin of 67% to 21%. (The actual vote in November 2002 was 55% to 45%.)

Slaughter

A March 2005 poll showed that by a margin of 83% to 17%, Americans support covering poultry under the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act.

A March 2001 Zogby poll of Americans found that 79% oppose the use of animals too sick or injured to walk (“downed” animals) in the human food supply.

Labeling

An October 2004 Decision Research poll of Washington, D.C., residents found that by a significant margin (73% to 18% and 72% to 15%, depending on how the question was asked), participants favored requiring that any animal products making a welfare claim on the packaging must meet a specified humane standard (the first question defined the standard and the second just specified that the standards are those of Whole Foods Market). The most persuasive message related to advocating this type of labeling involved a “consumer’s right to know.”