

Oppose the Livestock Board Bill (H.713): A Handout to Ag Lobbyists

An old, failed idea has been resurrected on Beacon Hill in order to confuse the public and amass more political influence for agribusiness

H. 713 would establish a “Livestock Care and Standards Board,” a concept backed by agribusiness lobbyists nationwide, usually in response to attempts to enact meaningful protections for farm animals. The boards are meant to give the illusion that the welfare of farm animals is being seriously considered, while actually maintaining the status quo. Nearly all of these proposals have been rejected by state lawmakers across the country, and a similar measure has been introduced in Massachusetts, and failed to pass, in previous years. Now it’s being resurrected and pushed to muddy the waters just as a genuine animal protection ballot measure gains momentum.

What would H. 713 do?

The bill would create a board that would have to approve (by a 2/3 majority) regulations promulgated by the Commissioner of the Department of Agricultural Resources. Only two of the thirteen seats are allotted to animal welfare advocates; most are reserved for agricultural producers and officials with direct or indirect financial ties to agribusiness. The board’s composition was specifically designed to quash any effort to pass meaningful protections for farm animals, as it puts the foxes in charge of the henhouse.

Why is this being pushed now?

Agribusiness is lobbying for H. 713 because it opposes the Act to Prevent Cruelty to Farm Animals. The act, supported by all the major state and national animal welfare charities, would simply require that certain farm animals be given enough space to turn around, stand up, lie down and extend their limbs. It would also ensure that certain meat and eggs sold in Massachusetts meet this modest standard. Polling shows that the vast majority of Massachusetts voters support this measure, and it’s backed by the MSPCA, ASPCA, Animal Rescue League of Boston, Zoo New England, and The Humane Society of the US, and more than 100 Massachusetts family farmers.

H. 713 should be rejected.

The bill simply gives agribusiness interests even more political influence, while squandering taxpayer dollars on another useless layer of bureaucracy. Cruelty to farm animals can be dealt with in the same way cruelty to all other animals is dealt with: through the regular legislative process involving lawmakers and voters. There’s no need for an agribusiness-stacked board to have veto power over the Department of Agricultural Resources. Livestock boards in other states have proven time and time again to be more concerned with giving factory farms a free pass than with actually protecting animals. Independent science—and commonsense—tells us that animals should be given at least enough room to turn around and lie down. The Act to Prevent Cruelty to Farm Animals is clearly written and is the appropriate manner in which to address the issue.