

## IN THEORY

*The Humane Society of the United States has reportedly unveiled a new initiative to better educate believers of various faiths on the mistreatment of farm animals such as hens, chickens and pigs. Underpinning the message to believers is a belief that the faithful are not receiving the message that animals are being subjected to harsh treatment, and that under the tenets of world faiths, God would not approve. Religion can play a role here, advocates say, to promote compassion for these animals as an obligation of faith.*

*Do you think believers need to know more about what is happening to these animals, and that there is a moral imperative -- a biblical mandate, as some theologians say -- to protect these animals from the suffering they face in factories and cages? What role, if any, can the religious community play here?*

While growing up in Glendale in the 1960's, I spent a good number of summers on my uncles' farms in eastern Ohio. Though predominantly dairy farms, my family also raised beef cattle, pigs, and chickens. It was my general understanding that all farm animals were raised as humanely as those I witnessed freely roaming the spacious green pastures or meandering around the barnyard. Unfortunately, the small family farm is becoming history and most Americans' roots are far from their rural pasts.

Corporate mega-sized farms are replacing small family farms which at one time were the backbone of the nation. Most are geared toward high volume of product with low financial cost. Large numbers of animals are crowded in small areas or confined in pens where movement is impossible. Chickens are routinely crammed into egg laying factories under bright lights for their entire adult lives.

I personally know of no one who would reject the principle that animals be treated humanely. And yet for most of us, the closest contact we have with these creatures is under plastic wrap at the local market. Scripture does require that we be good stewards of all creation. Cruelty to animals in any form does not edify the human condition. It is good if our own faith traditions can educate and help us appreciate the mystery of God's love in all of creation, even the animal kingdom.

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