

breaks have been planted on CRP acreages thanks to his efforts.

The potential for wildlife after CRP is tremendous, especially for those fields which will be returned to cropland. A 1991 survey of New Mexico's CRP participants indicated that 38.2 percent of the contracted acres will be returned to cropland. With approximately 480,000 acres in CRP, the potential for windstrips in cropland could be tremendous for wildlife.

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# Viewpoint: Wildlife and Animal Rights

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## Wildlife

Rodents, rabbits and hares (jackrabbit) are the major wildlife competitors of livestock for pasture on range forage. In the United States, these competitors also include pocket gophers, ground squirrels, prairie dogs, woodchuck, kangaroo rats, meadow mice or voles, cotton rats, moles, and many others of lesser importance (Marsh 1985). Wild ungulates can locally be serious competitors to livestock for forage.

The principal predators of livestock in the United States are the coyote, domestic dog, bobcat, golden eagle, red fox, gray fox and, less commonly grizzly bear, black bear, cougar, puma or lion, jaguar, gray wolf, Canada lynx, ocelot, and feral pig.

The increased restrictions on all vertebrate pest control methodology, especially the political banning of 1080 (sodium monofluoroacetate) in baits for coyote control (MacIntyre 1982, Howard and Schmidt 1984), makes it more difficult to protect domestic livestock from predators. Controlling competing rodents and predators on pastures and rangeland is becoming more complicated due to the animal rights and environmental movements. Many former animal control attitudes had to change. When issues become political the best compromises seldom appear. This has caused unwarranted restrictions and forced hundreds of livestock operators to go out of business during the past two decades.

Society has been negligent in supporting research to develop non-lethal means of coping with species that become serious pests. New control tools are not being developed fast enough to replace the lethal and toxic control methods being phased out. Many environmental and animal rights organizations find it financially lucrative to be very critical of animal control. They do not

want to lose their bread and butter and fail to propose or assist in the development of more socially and environmentally acceptable ways to resolve the conflicts that wildlife introduces in modified environments.

## Balance of Nature

Many people do not realize that when humans enter an environment, or use natural resources, this action alters the habitats of the native fauna. Once the environment has been modified, it then becomes essential to manage the species composition and diversity of the remaining native animals. This action is necessary to prevent more species from becoming locally extinct and to maintain a desirable natural balance. The natural predator-prey balance no longer exists in man-altered environments. People must assist nature by becoming a predator to help preserve a healthy balance and to prevent competition among the native species and domestic livestock.

Relatively untouched wilderness is a very scarce item. More will be lost if the main economic support to preserve these habitats, i.e., funds which game animals provide, should disappear. Today we are not dealing with true wilderness but instead are concerned with highly modified environments.

In the eyes of nature all nonhuman living things are equal and are justified in doing whatever is necessary to survive, even if at the expense of their own kind or other species. Nature is often very cruel and brutal. Humans are the most humane predator, for they are governed by numerous regulations and the only species that expresses mercy.

Public pressure for reform of any undesirable laissez faire treatment of animals has been achieved. This is good, but there has been an overkill. The extreme animal rights movement's goal of complete abolition of all exploitation of animals has had an undesirable and dramatic effect on much of the public's understanding of the balance of nature. Many do not understand nature's need for

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a high premature mortality rate. They do not realize that entire populations of animals can be loved to a horrible death by ignoring laws of nature as proposed by animal rightists. Non-human animals cannot be afforded the same rights as humans. Overpopulated human societies have inflicted great damage to a high percentage of the world's species. A premature death rate and a short life for surplus animals is what provides the energy for the balance of nature. The balance of nature is based upon predation and it would collapse without meat eaters.

### Animal Rights

My goal is to alert you to the serious dangers to the agriculture industry's crop and livestock production from the animal rights movement (ARM). These ARM leaders are NOT concerned with humaneness, although it is often used as a convenient fund raiser. People need to understand that the leaders of the ARM object to any use of animals, regardless of how humanely the animals are treated or how such use of animal may benefit wildlife, domestic animals, or people.

The financial contributors to animal rights organizations need to understand the true goals of those they are funding. The leaders and the ARM activists mislead the public by exaggerating the cruelty of modern soft-catch leg-hold traps. Some believe it is morally wrong to use any part of the fur or skin of a fur bearer, even from an animal that has died naturally. Three animal rights leaders have claimed to me that livestock operators should let their animals die of disease and starvation rather than be humanely slaughtered.

Philosophers like Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Mary Widdgby, Michael Fox, Stephen Clark, Bernard Rollin, Steve Sapotzis, and others argue that all animals should be liberated from any exploitation by humans, but seem to think it is okay for animals to brutally exploit each other, even if we are responsible because we modified their habitat thus causing the conflict. To me the wanton cruelty in modified environments experienced by surplus animals brought on by animal rightists who oppose proper animal harvesting in these altered environments is inexcusable.

Having taught a graduate course in animal welfare at the University of California, I recognize how successful the ARM has been in making the public more conscious of how animals are treated. I applaud this. However, with their highly emotional propaganda, they have also succeeded in obtaining lucrative contributions from a public who mistakenly thinks it is contributing to animal welfare. The public needs to be told repeatedly that the goal of the ARM is no use of animals and not that animals should be more humanely treated.

### Agriculture

Modern man cannot survive on a diet of just *native* vegetation. Animal rightists overlook the fact that most of the food consumed by livestock is not edible by humans. In addition to the health benefits of meat, it is essential that agriculture continue to produce many varieties of

cereals, vegetables, fruits, and nuts. If the ARM wins its crusade and most people become vegetarians, food will become much more expensive and certainly more limited in variety. If everyone became a vegetarian, not only will much more land have to be cultivated and irrigated, a much larger number of rodents, rabbits, deer, and other pest animals, including birds, will have to be killed.

A good question is, "Does a domestic animal miss a freedom it has never experienced any more than primitive people miss our public health and lifestyles?" Domestic animals are genetically very different from their wild ancestors, and most could not survive in nature. Compared to the natural world, practically all domestic animals, including laboratory animals, live a quality life, free of nature's survival-of-the-fittest struggle that wild animals constantly face, such as periodic hunger, cruel diseases, weather extremes, territorial battles, and other forms of nature's brutality (Howard 1991).

### Conclusion

We work diligently to insure a better quality of life for people, free of starvation, diseases, cannibalism, and fighting between individuals and populations, so why shouldn't we do our best to similarly manage animals in environments we have modified so that they can have a maximum quality life? Certainly all non-human animals we use in any way deserve serious moral concern. We should treat animals as humanely as possible when we exploit them, and never inflict "unnecessary" pain and suffering on them. But we must also remember that we have a moral responsibility to temper nature's brutality when it is the consequence of our having modified the environment. Animal rightists do not accept this. Their goals are to eliminate all livestock, all animal research, zoos, and indirectly seal the fate of many game animals and fur bearers that will lose out if no longer wanted.

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