

Egg-cellent news for hens

By Mark Hawthorne

THE CHINESE CALENDAR SAID IT BEST: 2005 was the Year of the Chicken. Animal advocates across the U.S. spent the year engaged in a variety of campaigns on behalf of chickens and are now celebrating enormous successes, both in winning major victories and raising the public's awareness about the suffering of hens. Many of these campaigns focused on the use of battery cages in egg production. Approximately 98 percent of the 336 million egg-laying hens in this country are housed in wire cages, which routinely hold eight or more birds apiece and give each hen less space than a letter-size sheet of paper—not even enough room to spread a single wing.

Among the most significant achievements in the crusade against battery cages occurred last November, when The Humane Society of the United States announced that the Trader Joe's grocery chain had agreed to switch to cage-

free eggs for its store brand. This will mean a substantial improvement in the lives of approximately 380,000 hens, who provide the more than 100 million Trader Joe's brand eggs sold annually. "More and more people are realizing that battery cages are so cruel, no socially responsible person or business can support them," says Erin Williams, an HSUS outreach coordinator.

Trader Joe's finally seeing the light at the end of the egg shed is just the latest success in HSUS' "No Battery Eggs" campaign, which last year convinced food-service providers like Bon Appétit, grocery stores including Wild Oats and Whole Foods and more than 70 colleges and universities to eliminate or drastically reduce their use of battery eggs. Since establishing its Factory Farming Campaign department in February 2005, the D.C.-based organization has been instrumental in generating policy changes that affect chickens. Last fall, HSUS teamed

with East Bay Animal Advocates to file a lawsuit challenging the USDA's policy of excluding chickens and other birds from the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, which stipulates that animals raised for food must be rendered insensible to pain before being killed.

More good news came from Compassion Over Killing, which, after collecting evidence and filing a complaint with the Better Business Bureau in 2003 and a lawsuit against an egg producer and two retailers in 2005, announced that United Egg Producers—a trade association representing 80 percent of the nation's 220 egg producers—had dropped its deceptive "Animal Care Certified" label on egg cartons. "The egg industry has misled consumers for three years by conveying a false message of humane animal care," says COK's executive director Erica Meier. "This is an important victory for animals and consumers."

Last year also saw the launch of EBAA's website exposing the horrors of egg production (cal-eggs.com), Viva!USA's campaign against the chicken-meat industry (vivachickens.com) and Animal Place leading a massive rescue of 1,800 "spent" hens from a battery-egg farm in Gilroy, Calif. (animalplace.org).

HSUS is now asking frozen-dessert giant Ben & Jerry's to stop using battery-cage eggs in its ice creams, all of which contain eggs. "It's hard to tell how it will all play out at this point," says Paul Shapiro, factory farming campaign manager for HSUS. "But we're hopeful the talks will end with Ben & Jerry's doing the right thing." **VN**

Mark Hawthorne is a regular contributor to VegNews. His work has been anthologized in *The Best Travel Writing 2005 (Travelers' Tales)* and *Stories To Live By (Solas House)*.

