Steve Ann Chambers

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The legislation also proposes that a person who abuses an animal can be sued civilly by the owner for damages, including emotional distress, out of pocket expenses, veterinary bills, attorney fees and a statutory damages award. So it can add up to a fairly sizable judgment against a person who commits this kind of crime.

The first anti-cruelty bill was defeated last year; why did that happen?

The legislators received a lot of misinformation. Some of the testimony in the legislative hearings was so off-base that it was clear to me some people had the wrong idea about what we were really proposing to do.

Where do you go from here?

We are working to educate people, in particular, legislators and their aids. Our message is that we're not trying to take something away from this industry or that – we're just putting a solid law in place that will not tolerate cruelty to animals.

Do you think it will be successful this time?

We have some key people committed to seeing it passed, and I am confident it will. Hundreds of ALDF members wrote on our behalf in support of the first bill, and it made a very big impact on the supportive legislators.

In 1987, you helped to break up a dog-napping ring that sold stolen dogs to research laboratories. Tell us about that case.

There were actually several cases. It was a pretty big problem here at that time – one person had allegedly been hiring or paying teenagers to steal pets and then was selling them to research labs. There were several other instances of people who responded to the newspaper ads of people seeking new homes for their dogs. The people who responded would portray themselves as being very caring animal people who would give the dog a great home. They usually would convince the owners to turn over their dog, suggesting that the former owner "come out and visit anytime, I'm sure he'd love to see you again"– but, of course they were giving out phoney names and addresses. Often, the animals ended up being used for research. In one case, a former owner learned that his dog had been killed for research. That person brought a lawsuit against the couple who fraudulently took his dog, and won. In response to this problem, I helped draft a piece of legislation that carries a pretty significant criminal penalty for being involved in that kind of crime. It seems to have made a difference in our area. However, I recently learned of several dealers who are allegedly circumventing that law and we're working to expose them and put an end to their activity.

Factory farming is the most blatantly overlooked animal rights problem that we have in our country.

You worked with a Washington animal rights group (PAWS) and passed a pet overpopulation bill last year. Has this new law brought about any changes yet?

Yes. The aim is to get people to license and neuter their animals, and to stop the overpopulation problem. The law requires that there be a decrease in euthanasia by at least 50% by 1996 or certain bans on breeding will come into effect. The Executive Director at PAWS informs me that the new law has significantly decreased euthanasia of animals here in King County. It has been a real success.

What areas of animal abuse need more work?

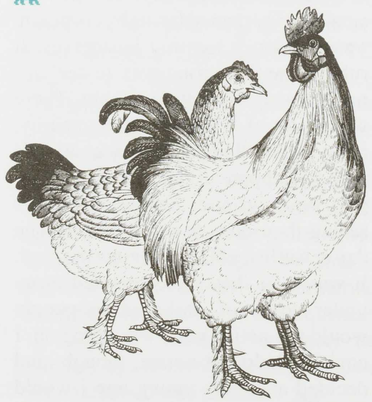
Factory farming is the most blatantly overlooked animal rights problem that we have in our country.

What makes it so difficult?

The general public is still unaware of the problems. Factory farming and intensive confinement of animals for meat production in this country is not only inhumane for the animals, it is unsafe for humans and it is polluting our environment. Witness the deadly outbreak of E. coli recently in the Northwest (which was traced to tainted beef), and consider the widespread use of antibiotics and hormones in factory farmed meat production. Then look to see what the run-off from these waste factories is doing to our rivers and streams. It is a no-win proposition for everyone except those who make their livelihood in the meat industry. But there can be no meaningful change in the laws regulating these industry practices until the public wakes up and demands it.

How do you view the progress of the movement as a whole?

I think we're making significant strides. It is a slow process, and at times, it's frustrating. But when I look back and see the progress made in the last 10 years, then I feel, yes – we are making a difference. I project that forward and think how different the situation will be for animals in 50 years, and that's very hopeful. That's what keeps me going.



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Make your employer a partner in giving

The following companies state: if their employees donate to a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, they will match the gift. If you work for one of the companies on this list, obtain a matching gift form from your personnel office and follow the directions for initiating a match. This way your contribution to ALDF can have double the impact. If your employer is not on this list, ask them to consider starting a matching gifts program.

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