

Vegetarian TIMES

Mafia connections and deplorable living conditions for his birds.

The public outcry hasn't been as noisy as before. Although Spira is trying to protect billions of animals, this time his public-relations tool isn't cute kittens or fuzzy bunnies, which more easily arouse public sympathy. This time it's chickens, which most of the American public views as food, not pets or wildlife.

Spira hasn't managed to transform Perdue and the rest of the chicken industry to the extent that he turned around the cosmetics business. But his Perdue campaign already has had a positive effect on the slaughterhouse business.

Although Perdue continues to ignore him, Spira is capitalizing on his current campaign in order to improve conditions in slaughterhouses where conscious cattle are shackled and hoisted upside down. Spira wants to see these systems replaced by the more humane, upright restrainer systems. Here's his tactic: He approaches national companies that buy meat from the offending slaughterhouses and warns them that they too could find themselves portrayed in unflattering terms in newspaper ads and subject to consumer boycotts unless they pressure their suppliers to adopt humane slaughtering techniques.

Three companies already have adopted these changes rather than be exposed, and Spira has honored his commitment not to publicize their names. And he credits the Perdue campaign with motivating these companies to change. "The [Perdue] ads have made it possible to have a dialogue with the meat industry to activate alternatives," Spira says. "Part of the reason why that was made possible is that they don't want to be Perdueed."

But Frank Perdue can rest assured that Henry Spira won't go away. Spira will keep exposing the animal abuses that go on in the chicken industry and beyond, patiently applying pressure for change. And over time, Spira says, the ranks of those who agree with him will grow. "I don't think the animal-rights movement is a fashion or a fad," he says. "It's just a logical next step. It's only been relatively recently that all humans have started to be included in the circle of society's concern—Native Americans, Blacks, women, and so on. Once you've got all humans within this circle, it's just inevitable that the next step is going to be the nonhuman animals."

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