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Farm Sanctuary: Caring for our Planet (Interview with Gene Baur)

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FARM SANCTUARY

Interview with Founder and President, Gene Baur

June 19, 2015 - Watkins Glen, NY



Forward: In April, 2015, Gene Baur launched his second book, "Living the Farm Sanctuary Life" which exposes the extent and level of cruelty shown toward animals – particularly those typically associated with factory farms and slaughterhouses. Whereas historically, ethical leadership has been associated with human activities, Baur has crusaded, over the course of three decades, to expose people's inhumane treatment of these animals, their sentient features – as juxtaposed to their treatment as mere commodities, and the degradation of the environment, human health, and biodiversity associated with commercial farming.

Environment and Health Problems: According to the Food and Agricultural Organization for the United Nations (FAO):

- Livestock production is the largest user of agricultural land either for grazing or growing feed. It currently accounts for approximately 40 percent of the gross value of world

agricultural production. And with a growing global population and shared prosperity, there is a commensurate increased demand for meat, fertilizer, dairy products, wool, leather, and forms of transport. In fact, global demand is projected to increase by 70 percent to feed a population estimated to reach 9.6 billion by 2050.

- The rapid growth of the livestock sector has had considerable impact on the environment, heavily contributing to deforestation in some countries, particularly in Latin America. Also, it has been a major factor contributing to soil erosion, desertification, increased disease transmission between animals and with humans, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, polluted water supplies, and antibiotics resistance – all threatening human health. And while the entire transport system accounts for 12-13 percent of GHGs contributing to climate change, it is livestock production which is the primary culprit, accounting for an unprecedented 18 percent.
- Overstocking land with grazing animals causes significant soil erosion, desertification, and the loss of plant and animal biodiversity. Public health hazards are increasing, especially with regard to waste generated from industrial livestock facilities. These operations pollute water supplies, emit greenhouse gases, and introduce an overabundance of antibiotics into the human system.



When did this journey — championing the ethical treatment of animals and bringing attention to the abuses of factory farming and slaughterhouses — begin? How old were you when this property was purchased in New York?



Let's see. I was about 23 or 24 when I got the farm started and got this place when I was maybe 26 or 27.



And you purchased this for \$125,000?

Actually, we first offered \$95,000. It was originally on the market for \$110,000 and had a beautiful farmhouse on it. We bought it for \$100,000, having put \$25,000 down. So we bought this whole property for \$100,000 – unfortunately, the old farmhouse was taken down.



Yesterday [June 18, 2015], the Pope issued his encyclical on Climate Change. It is uniquely entitled “*On Care for our Common Home*.” Without having read the entire 300-page document, I conducted a word search with respect to “livestock” and “animal cruelty,” and here is what I found. I am reading from paragraph 130:

In the philosophical and theological vision of the human being and of creation, it is clear that the human person, endowed with reason and knowledge, is not an external factor to be excluded. While human intervention on plants and animals is permissible when it pertains to the necessities of human life...human power has limits and that it is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly.” [All such use and experimentation on animals] “require a religious respect for the integrity of creation. [A study of ecology] ... necessarily entails reflection and debate about the conditions required for the life and survival of society, and the honesty needed to question certain models of development, production, and consumption. It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected.

Do you think that this will help many to change their current perspectives and perhaps pressure politicians to legislate change with respect to the inequities and abuses of factory farming?

I think the Pope making a statement like that is significant and will be impactful; I believe that those who disagree with him will start rallying their troops to counter the efforts to advance legislation and policies that are consistent with his message. The Pope's message and voice

are very important. Here he is, the leader of this giant body and he is making these statements, recognizing that we are all interconnected in the web of life. He is saying, in a sense, that when we harm others, we harm ourselves because we are all connected. When he talks about killing unnecessarily, or causing suffering unnecessarily, to me, this jumps to the point that if we can live well without killing and eating other animals, why wouldn't we? You know that his language is vague there and that is probably purposeful, but he is explicit about animal experimentation and says that it is not to be done unless for human necessity. It is not to be done to test cosmetics, but if it advances human health and wellbeing, that is where it gets a little more complex. And there are different animal rights activists' perspectives. But I think that his statement is very important and I hope that it will be very impactful.

I tend to connect most with the liberation theology Catholic types like Greg Boyle. He was a priest and one of my teachers in high school; he runs Homeboy Industries in L.A., which operates with the motto that "nothing stops a bullet like a job." He works with gangs and attempts to improve people's lives. So with the Catholic Church, you have different types and perspectives. So I am grateful that the Pope is acknowledging that all lives, including animals' lives, matter. Hopefully, his message will resonate within the Catholic church, and beyond. I think that he is tapping into ancient wisdom – the core of Christianity and the core of every major faith.



And the release of this encyclical was, apparently, timed with the advent of the "Road to Paris" – a conference, one of the largest planned – on climate change this December. Government, business, and NGO leaders are expected to attend. Are you, or do you know of anyone who will be present there to speak on the impact of the livestock business on climate change?

I can't be there unfortunately, but am speaking with colleagues, and hope some will be in attendance. This is an important topic. You know that Al Gore introduced "An Inconvenient Truth" on a universal scale over 20 years ago, but it really did not address the effects of livestock farming on climate change even though science indicates that the CO₂ emissions from the livestock industry — including the removal and clearing of property for growing the feed necessary for these animals – is more than that emitted from the entire transport industry.



Would you say that business in general is harmful to animals?

We are not anti-business; we are anti-cruelty. We are opposed to irresponsible and destructive business practices.



You have three farms in the United States: Watkins Glen, Orland and Acton California. In considering the effects of climate change on your business operations, we can see the abundance of rain here in New York, but California is suffering from one of its worst droughts ever. How are you handling this crisis? Water rationing just among humans has set off some serious, and dangerous repercussions [Sao Paulo, Brazil is an example]. I would imagine that if this extends on, that animal needs will definitely be secondary to those of humans. Are you experiencing any problems now? Do you have any contingency plans in the event rationing is next?

Our sanctuaries are relatively small in terms of the overall water we use. Of course, it can be a struggle especially during draughts and we are doing what we can to conserve, but I think what ultimately needs to happen, and Moby² is working on this, is to push for policies that stop subsidies for animal agriculture which are terribly wasteful and inefficient. We could feed ten times more people by growing and eating them directly, instead of growing plants and feeding them to animals who are then slaughtered.

I have seen slaughterhouses that use water in a way that seems to be purposefully wasteful. For example, there was a slaughterhouse using firehoses to herd calves to the kill floor. I think they did this for a few reasons. First, it was easy just to push the calves in this way and to rinse off feces and dirt at the same time. I think another reason is that this was to maintain a water allotment. By establishing a quota and showing their historical use, they can maintain access to a lot of water.

And they need to maintain that access and pay far below the market value for this precious and scarce resource. I read recently where some cities that needed water struck a deal with farmers to get water at a big markup. So I think the area that needs to be looked at is animal agriculture. You have so much water that is used for animal food that could be more efficiently used for human food.

¹ An American electronic singer song-writer, vegan, and animal rights activist.



As science shows, methane gas – both a product of landfill waste and of buried cow manure – is more toxic than what comes out of a tailpipe. There are new technologies, however, used on certain dairy farms that capture the methane gas and use same for energy – much like other businesses are currently doing. So could it be argued that this sort of byproduct is not as harmful to the climate as many would think it to be?



It's less bad to capture methane gas than not, but it's far better to prevent excess methane from being produced at all. The best way to do that is to get away from raising animals for slaughter.



I am from Indiana where approximately 85% of the corn – and soybeans for that matter – grown is used to feed livestock. What would those farmers do in the alternative?

Grow corn or other crops for human consumption – that's what we are advocating across the board. It just makes sense for human health and animal well-being.



Several years ago, I wrote an article entitled "Benevolent Capitalism" for the *JVBL* and focused on the Amish, Ray Anderson of Interface Global [Atlanta], Bill & Melinda Gates, Trevor Field [Roundabout, Johannesburg, SA], and Duncan Goose [founder and president of One Water in the UK]. Through my interviews and research, there appeared to be a common thread which helped to shape who they were and what they were going to do in their respective business pursuits. This common element was spirituality or, in other words, the influence and impact of a religious upbringing. You note in previous interviews that the majority of mankind has the capacity for compassion and you have already mentioned here that you grew up in a Catholic household and attended a Jesuit high school. Do you believe that what you have done and are doing is motivated or influenced, in any manner, by a sense of spirituality and a need to be a steward?

I think so. I grew up and was encouraged to be an engineer and make money, or even to go into the military service, but I didn't want to be a cog in the wheel that was causing so much harm. I had gone to Catholic school and was bombarded by moral messages like "Thou shall not kill;" "Do unto others;" "Helping the least of these" – those sorts of things struck a chord. The harsh tendency to judge was a turn off. I believe the environment and animals should be part of our sphere of compassion and concern. I remember seeing trees cut down as a child right across the street from my parent's house in the hills ... and this really bothered me ... as well as animals harmed by human activity. I felt that we were not behaving in a responsible way to the earth and to the rest of creation...and I just did not want to be part of this monstrous machine and so in high school and college, I started looking for ways to make a positive difference. I learned about factory farming – the fact that it was causing so much harm to the animals, to people, and to the earth – and believed it needed to be challenged. It is an affront to creation and our own humanity. And all of us grew up unwittingly supporting it – eating



animals without thinking about what we were doing. So we grew up eating certain ways because it was the norm and I came to see how bad becomes normal.



How old were you when you started to have these feelings?

I think we're all born with an innate connection to animals and the natural world, which tends to be indoctrinated out of us. When that tree was cut down, I was probably younger than 10. It was just a natural feeling.

I was just generally bothered by the harm humans were causing because of our hubris, thoughtlessness, and carelessness – our basic failure to empathize with others. To me, it was not being kind to the least of these. Another one of those quotes I grew up with was "To whom much is given much is expected/required." And humans have a lot of power. Another resonant quote is that "absolute power corrupts absolutely." So we are in a position to have power and with that, I believe that we have been very irresponsible. The earth is suffering, as well as the animals, and so are we, and it doesn't have to be that way. In the U.S., we are an especially affluent nation, and use a huge amount of the earth's resources.



Where we represent approximately 5% of the world's population and use close to 25% of the world's nonrenewable resources...

Exactly. I think we need to act more mindfully and responsibly. We are at an interesting time in our history. The book, *The Sixth Extinction*,² provides a real wake-up call.



Like the “Death of Birth” – the first chapter of Paul Hawkins’ “The Ecology of Commerce?”

Exactly.



I’m going to read to you a statement previously issued by the United Nations in 1998 – actually, it is formally known as the U.N.’s

Declaration of Human Rights and states: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” The declaration specifies dozens of particular human rights, including the right to be free from slavery, torture, and cruel or degrading treatment.... Do you believe that this should extend to animals and if so, why?



I would love to see that applied to animals as well. When we enslave others, we harm them and we harm ourselves. Animals have feelings and relationships and when we treat them in an inhumane way, it’s bad for everybody. For me, the vegan lifestyle boils down to our relationship with others and ideally, our goal should be to create mutually-beneficial relationships – with humans, with animals, with the earth ... and to live in respectful ways. Certain species are different than others, certain animals are different from other animals, and certain people are different from other people. So there are differences, but there are similarities as well, especially when it comes to the right to live, to not be enslaved, and to not be abused. I think that all life, all creatures deserve that.

There are prejudices ... beliefs that certain animals exist to be exploited in a particular way and that that is their station in life. Such beliefs lead to discriminatory practices and certainly not to mutually beneficial relationships. Prejudicial beliefs allow bad things to happen and that leads to validations and rationalizations where we say things like “They don’t deserve any better.” Similar statements have been made forever about various exploited victims, along with notions like “That’s what they are here for” or “That is the natural way” and “That is the way it is supposed to be.” We should rethink such statements, and also consider that just because humans have done something for a long time doesn’t mean we should continue doing it.

² Elizabeth Kolbert, author.



So perhaps the question should be, “Is this how you wish to be treated?” Do you ascribe to the understanding that a cause or way of thinking can’t be preached, but can only be demonstrated by providing a model?

Yes, I do, as preaching to others often puts up the walls. Our goal is to knock down walls and open up hearts, and I believe modeling kindness and setting a good example are effective ways to do that.



Do you have qualms with small farms? I have personally studied various Amish communities. They all work as an integrated system. Everyone works. The milking starts early in the morning and the horse and buggy represent the mainstay mode of transportation. Occasionally, a cow is killed for meat. And these are not people who are making money; this is subsistence agriculture. These are not lavish lifestyles – everything is integrated. You talk about the re-emergence of the small farms versus the factory farm. Where does one stop and the other begin? In order to legislate clearly, a definition must be provided. Certain laws in the US only apply to “larger businesses” defined as having over 50 full-time employees. Would you have to quantify this for purposes of legislation?

We have not quantified it, but it has been quantified. The USDA defines a “CAFO” – Confined Animal Feeding Operation – as a specific number of animal units, for example. The way I define factory farming is more about attitude, and the way we relate to other animals and the natural world. To me, factory farming is an attitude that commodifies sentient life and sees animals in the natural world as mere commodities to be exploited for profit. Animals are treated as inanimate property, not as living, feeling creatures. Even in the case of small farms, which are not technically CAFOs according to the USDA definition, you have animals who are treated very badly and seen as commodities. This is not a mutually beneficial relationship. To me, the fundamental question is – is this a mutually beneficial relationship?



And looking just at the health aspects of a plant-based diet...sometimes, in some cases, perhaps the alternative is not feasible. For instance, substituting cow’s milk for almond-based milk. Almonds, largely grown in California, are one of the most water-intensive crops. And soy-based milk – for those who have been diagnosed with breast cancer– the common medical advice is to refrain from having any soy-based products as they have the potential to stimulate the creation of new breast cancer cells. So you are going to have different folks with different considerations to take into account; they simply have different dietary restrictions.

There are various myths, beliefs, and prejudices that are perpetuated to maintain the status quo. I think that one of the reasons that almonds have been getting negative publicity is that

almond production is increasing in California, adding to water demand, but plant farming is an inherently more efficient use of water than animal farming, especially when you consider water-intense crops like alfalfa which is grown to feed farm animals. We should utilize our scarce water to grow fruits, vegetables, and other plant foods instead of squandering it with animal agriculture. In terms of soy, there are different health experts who would have different opinions. Soy has been a healthful, nutritious part of the human diet for thousands of years, and that continues today, despite what its detractors say.³

Q:

I am looking at your work in influencing legislation. You seem to have been instrumental in banning the use of gestational crates in Florida and California in the recent past?



And in Arizona. too. First in Florida, and then Arizona, and then California. Each of those states banned the use of inhumane confinement devices for farm animals through voter initiatives.

Q:

In December of 2014, presidential candidate and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie banned a measure which would have prohibited these crates. Governor Branstad of Iowa, home of campaign kick-offs and the largest producer of pork, praised this measure, using the argument that people do not understand the raising of pigs and the propensity of sows to trample and kill piglets without this type of confinement. Without this ban, Branstad argued that the price of pork would be driven up. Your comments?

³ October 26, 2015 update: The research arm of the World Health Organization recently reported that meats, especially processed meats, are carcinogenic to humans.

It's amazing how misinformed, or dishonest, these politicians are... Branstad is talking about a concern with sows trampling piglets? But this legislation only dealt with gestation crates, where sows are kept during their pregnancy, confined so tightly that they cannot even turn around. The legislation didn't pertain to sows after giving birth, so mentioning piglets is misleading. Unfortunately, industry power and politics triumphed here over societal values. This measure was passed overwhelmingly by the state legislature of New Jersey and over 90% of New Jersey citizens supported it.



Could you use Proposition 2⁴ that was offered to the citizens in California in New Jersey as well and try to make this more of a people's mandate there?

New Jersey does not have a similar initiative process ... unfortunately. So issues like this cannot be brought to citizens for a popular vote like we did in California.



Are you currently working in other states on legislation similar to this?

We are looking at several states ... the initiatives hit a high point in 2008 with Proposition 2 in California. We won that with a strong 63% "yes" vote. Since then, we've had a few initiatives started. And those were leveraged to make progress through the legislature. Like in Michigan, for example, where legislation was signed to outlaw veal crates, gestation crates, and battery cages. In the wake of Prop 2, several states have enacted restrictions on extreme confinement, and dozens of major food companies have implemented policies and protocols to require farmers to treat animals better.⁵



Leveraging one's clout to ensure that perhaps other reliant or vendor businesses want to stay in good graces?

So the initiatives had created this movement and now the businesses are picking up. After the initiative was passed in Arizona in 2006, some of the largest pork and veal producers in the country announced that they would phase out gestation and veal crates. Business and market reforms are now under way, and these could have massive impacts over time.



Public pressure?

⁴ Also known as "Standards for Confining Farm Animals," this initiated state statute was approved on November 4, 2008, and prohibits the confinement of farm animals in a manner that restricts them from turning around freely, lying down, standing up, and fully extending their limbs. The law went into full effect on January 1, 2015.

⁵ Update: In September, 2015, McDonald's Corp pledged to phase out eggs laid by caged hens in its North American restaurants.

Public pressure. It comes down to voting with our dollars. If the consumer is not going to buy it, producers will stop producing it. There is a growing demand for vegan products, and many opportunities for businesses in this arena.



In 2006, you were instrumental in banning foie gras⁶ in the City of Chicago. But wasn't that repealed only a few years later?

That was really a power battle between Mayor Daley and the Progressive arm of the Democratic Party led by Alderman Joe Moore. Unfortunately, the more conservative Daley machine won this battle.



How did you become involved in that?

I don't know exactly how it got started but we worked very closely with Joe Moore after we passed a law in the State of California in 2004 to ban the sale and production of foie gras.



Wouldn't you think that Governor Jerry Brown would be on your side?

I think he will, and that he is generally better on these issues than most politicians.



I was wondering with a new mayor – Rahm Emmanuel – who recently won an election runoff for his second term – that the opportunity might resurface?

It's possible, but there are currently no plans to revisit this issue legislatively in Chicago.



After having listened to some of your earlier speeches, I noticed the repetition of two main themes – “empathy” and “entrenchment.” And entrenchment was spoken in regard to habits and politics. When you look at both, don't you find an oxymoron?

There is often an inconsistency between our ideals and our actions; between our hopes and our daily behaviors. It's impossible to be perfect. You know that no human being is perfect. Just walking on the planet means we are going to cause some harm. But to me, being vegan is



⁶ Technically, duck or goose liver. The birds are forced-fed corn broiled in fat to artificially, and painfully, increase their size; a main entrée in French cuisine.

a way to live as harmlessly as possible and to live in empathy with others. In the case of animal agriculture, billions of animals are exploited every year and are subjected to extreme cruelty. Humans control every aspect of animals' lives from conception to slaughter. We exert complete control over the animals' lives and with that comes responsibility. When it comes to factory farming, we are not behaving responsibly. It is an affront to animals, and to our humanity. I've spoken with academics and experts on Catholic doctrine and have been told that from the Catholic perspective, it is not forbidden to eat meat if it is necessary for our survival, but it's not ideal. So it was formally recognized that it's not ideal. If we have a choice, it's better not to eat animals. That's the direction that I think things should go.



Do you think, then, that the first step is to educate the public that animals – particularly farm animals – are sentient, feeling creatures and should be respected and treated as such?

Yes, and I think that another important point to recognize is that killing and eating animals is a choice. It is not necessary. Unfortunately, most of us in this country grew up with the belief that animal-based food is essential for our health. This belief needs to be questioned and investigated. I have been vegan since 1985 and I know others who have been vegan long before me. If we can live without killing; that seems like the better choice to me.





Q: Would you extend this philosophy to all animals?

For certain other animals, I think they do not have a choice. The lion needs to eat other animals to survive; they are carnivores. Humans can live well and thrive as vegans.



Q: And for marine life?

Fish are sentient creatures and they have feelings too. It is better if we don't eat them.



Q: But let's say that a country relies on marine life due to its topography. It lacks the necessary land to grow the plant food and must import the majority of its foodstuffs from abroad. This, then, requires a substantial CO₂ footprint due to the transportation needed.

There are many plant-based approaches to growing food that are more efficient, and less violent, than consuming fish or other animals. Vertical gardens, container gardens, and rooftop gardens could be used in urban areas, for example. And to raise animals, either on land or in the sea, you need plants, and it's more efficient to use the plants to feed humans rather than to feed the animals.



Q: I am considering countries such as Japan and Korea – which are largely fish-based food economies and simply lack the necessary space and terrain to feed its populations. And this is even more so considering the nuclear contamination of Northern Japan due to the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March of 2011. But some fishing methods have been deemed cruel – especially as Japan's whaling practices of continuous hooking until death have been in question.

I am glad that there is widespread concern and interest in protecting whales. However, there is often less consideration for other marine life. Numerous marine species have been decimated as a result. The key question for Japan and other countries is how to best feed themselves, and I believe that eating plants, both from the land and the sea, is the best way to do so.



Q: So when you speak about our entrenchment in both our habits and our politics, I have to draw an example from the tobacco industry. For forty years, it was a struggle to bring the science of human health concerns to the forefront due to the political and economic power of that industry. We started with a ban on magazine ads – then billboards – then

we had the Surgeon's General message... and then, ultimately, it was uncovered in the mid-1990s, that the AMA⁷ was the largest owner of tobacco stock. This revelation appeared to have a substantial impact on public opinion. This was when the hypocrisy was exposed and the individual civil lawsuits began which were largely unsuccessful, but prompted many states' attorney generals to bring suit against the big tobacco companies in an attempt to recoup Medicaid costs paid on behalf of its indigent citizens with tobacco-related lung diseases. The civil action was eventually settled. Yet the public seems to be continuously misled, especially when seemingly credible institutions and figureheads point us in a certain direction. These are people who we trust or who are credentialed. And now we appear to be doing this with big oil and the gun industry.

These are entrenched, powerful, political interests.



And now, when we look to the pharmaceutical industry— holding the largest number of patents – we want access to drugs as cure-alls. We have bought into this without seriously considering alternatives. Nobody wants to wait another 40 years like tobacco to expose the deficiencies, so how do you get the word out? What has been your experience with disseminating your message through social media avenues?

With videos of animal cruelty being seen and shared widely online, people are gaining a greater understanding. At the same time, many vegan recipes are posted and shared online. Access to information is increasing and when people know better, they can do better. Information empowers people to make choices more in line with their own interests and values. As this happens, we are going to see change. Pharmaceuticals have a lot of power and that power is entrenched in both our food and healthcare systems. Most of the antibiotics produced are fed to farm animals and then people develop heart disease from eating animals, and then they take pills and other drugs. Pharmaceuticals are making money on the front and back end of this wasteful, harmful system. Animal agriculture also uses enormous quantities of fossil fuel including in the form of petro-chemical fertilizers, pesticides, etc. So there is a dangerous alignment there... in entrenched interests. We need to shift from an extractive, destructive food system, to one that is more respectful, responsible, and regenerative.



With regard to eco- or environmental labeling of certain products like “antibiotic-free” and “free-range eggs” – you have mentioned that this type of marketing sounds better than it really is and may even be characterized as “greenwashing.” Have you worked with Dara O'Rourke in the formation of GoodGuide⁸ ratings or the FTC's Green Guides which both try to streamline and make uniform these supposed or claimed traits? And even

⁷ American Medical Association.

⁸ Founded in 2007 by Dara O'Rourke, professor of environmental and labor policy at University of California, the GoodGuide provides economic, environmental, and social responsibility ratings of commonly-purchased products to consumers.

more so – on an international scale – with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) which also tries to make foodstuff claims universal in meaning?

We put out information on these marketing labels and it is online, but we have not worked directly with these organizations. There are also relatively new "B" corporations – again, a title that must be earned.

Q: Benefit – "B" corporations?⁹

Yes – I think so.

Q: And of course, there is the movement toward measuring a business's "triple-bottom line" which goes beyond mere assessment of an entity's financial gain and measures environmental stewardship and social responsibility standards as well. The United Nations-sponsored Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) provides metrics to help companies create their own baseline measurements. This helps to push companies to review their own practices and formulate goals for improvement. Publication of these reports is voluntarily done.

I think these are positive steps, and would be interested to know more about these metrics.

Q: The company picks the level of questions to answer and the results do not provide the rating; the level of questioning (A, B, or C) does. So a company could conceivably be the worse polluter and/or labor oppressor in the world and still report on an A-rating scale. Those who do want to improve from their baseline measurements ensure that their reports are publically displayed to show improvements. Again, this helps them to set goals, but it's still a private initiative.

I think it's good to see how various companies compare with others in the industry, but sometimes you are just comparing bad and less bad practices.

Q: Exactly.

With respect to "downed" animals¹⁰ ... I know that you have been very effective with federal legislation which prohibits using downed livestock for food. But do you know

⁹ A "B" or a benefit corporation is a type of for-profit organization that is certified by individual states recognizing this type of corporation as one that produces a positive impact on society and the environment in addition to generating profit.

¹⁰ An animal that cannot stand on its own – usually as a result of injury or illness.

whether these prohibited carcasses are dumped by the affected companies into other countries?

I don't believe that this has happened but the industry can be pretty sneaky. Federally, we were able to ban the slaughter of downed cows – and we are still working to prevent other downed animals like pigs, for example, from being transported and slaughtered for food. I think the practicality of transporting downed animals overseas or to other countries is impracticable; the cost of transportation is probably greater than the income that would result. I think that dumping applies more to products like agricultural chemicals that cannot be used in the U.S. so are exported and dumped in other markets.



You have been asked in one of your presentations about using commercials to help spread the word, but you mentioned that that was largely cost-prohibitive. But with your celebrity power and your network, would it be feasible to get any donated time on the air? Several Humane Society commercials depict dogs and cats in deplorable conditions and appear to successfully open the public's eyes and stimulate their conscience. Would this not be equally beneficial for the sanctuaries?

We would love to do that, but from a financial standpoint it is very expensive. We have a great deal of public education to do and commercials could play a role in this, but we just don't have the financial wherewithal to do this right now. At this time, we are trying to reach people through online ads and YouTube videos.



As a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, Farm Sanctuary doesn't pay any property taxes, correct?



We don't pay property tax on much of our land, but do pay tax on land used for our B&Bs and a few other activities. We are exempt from some tax, and also pay tax. It depends on the state and the activity.



So with Farm Sanctuary in 3 places – Watkins Glen, Acton, and Orland – how much do you interact with the local communities?

We are one of the top attractions here in Watkins Glen, New York, and for many years we have worked closely with different business owners, including the local franchise owner of Burger King, who started selling the veggie burger here in the early 1990s. Ultimately, this led to Burger King selling a veggie burger nationwide. Many of the other restaurants in town now offer vegan alternatives because of our visitors to Farm Sanctuary. So we have had a significant impact here in Watkins Glen, but in Orland, the impact has been less. However, in Acton, since we are very close to Los Angeles, we have been able to bring celebrities out to the farm and their visits have helped draw attention to our issues.



Jon Stewart referred to you as a “pragmatist,” and you have stated that while “nobody is perfect,” at a minimum, we should learn and reflect. Have you progressed as much as you had hoped to? Why or why not?

I am happy with the progress we have made, but we still have a long way to go. When Farm Sanctuary started back in 1986, I would be happy to know that in 2015 we’d have three farms and nearly 100 staff people and we would be able to enact state laws and influence federal legislation and raise awareness as we have through the mainstream media. We didn’t have projections for what we would look like 25 to 30 years down the road, but I am very pleased with the growing awareness and growing support for our work. We are now working in the midst of a convergence of issues, and working with environmental groups, social justice groups, and healthcare people. It’s never been a better time to be vegan.



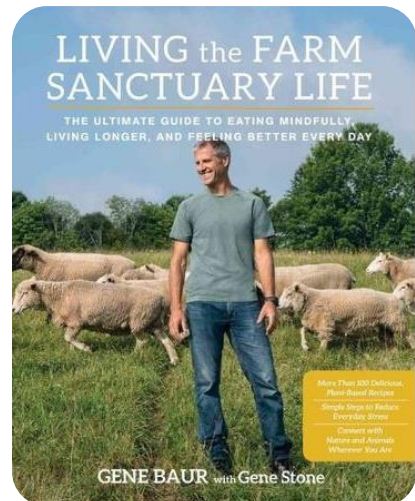
How would you describe your influence on college campuses, especially in terms affecting college curriculum, especially in the departments of business, economic, and law? Has your book been offered as a potential manual or text?

I would love to see us working more on college campuses.¹¹



Perhaps the *Farm Sanctuary* books could be offered as eBooks or other supplemental texts? Do you think that this might begin to help change a mindset, especially with respect to young people?

Yes. I think we would be very interested in this.



¹¹ Update: Baur recently accepted an associate appointment in Health, Behavior, and Society at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health where he will be involved with evidence-based work on food and farming issues related to public health, the environment, and animal welfare.



Let's talk about the costs entailed in running these farms. I would imagine that the vet fees alone must be incredibly high?

Yes – the costs are substantial for running the sanctuaries. But part of what makes us who we are is that we do care enough to give individualized treatment to animals and to provide the best care possible.



Would you consider partnering with universities to provide student internships?

Yes, and we actually have an internship program already in existence.



If there is ever a 4th Farm Sanctuary, would you consider partnering with a university or college? Perhaps one with a medical or vet school to attract students to donate some of their time?

We always look for ways to engage and partner with aligned individuals and institutions.



And the cost of maintaining a vegan diet? Isn't it prohibitive for so many people?

It does not have to be expensive. There is even a book out called "Eat Vegan on \$4 a Day"?¹² Eating berries and other fresh produce in season is another good way to eat affordably.



John Mackey, CEO of Whole Foods, wrote a controversial op ed in 2009 in the *New York Times* which essentially stated that people were responsible for their own state of health, whether they were born with a particular condition or not. He decried the passage of the *Affordable Care Act*,¹³ calling it fascist. Of course, shortly thereafter, he back-peddled when the tide of public opinion turned against him. I know you both strongly advocate healthy eating. But when it comes to the gentrification of especially our urban areas, you are not going to find a Whole Foods, or even a farmer's market, in poorer neighborhoods – certainly not on the South Side of Chicago or in Gary, Indiana. They are typically confined to upscale neighborhoods.

There's a guy in the Bronx who runs Green Bronx Machine which is making plant food accessible in traditionally underserved communities. He's a teacher at a school where they

¹² Jones, Ellen Jaffe (2011). *Eat Vegan on \$4.00 a Day: A Game Plan for the Budget Conscious Cook*. Summertime, TN: Book Publishing Company.

¹³ Also known as "Obamacare."

had around a 40% attendance rate. After he started working with the kids to grow plants, attendance rose to over 90%. It's so encouraging to see these kids empowered by this activity. Some are now spinning off entrepreneurial enterprises like going to the Hamptons and planting edible landscaping. There are enormous opportunities for programs like this.

People learn from those around them and when there are positive models, they tend to be replicated. However, if role models aren't eating well or growing plant foods, you don't know that it is even a possibility! I envision champions for healthier, plant-based lifestyles emerging in various communities, including in churches. I could see community meetings every weekend after church where somebody buys a 50-pound sack of beans and another buys a 50-pound sack of rice, doles it out very affordably, and has instructions on it ... "you soak the beans" ... and "dry the beans," maybe even prepare meals together. People are social creatures and need to have positive examples and models.



In your book, I don't remember seeing anyone of color. So I am wondering that when you look at those sectors of folk who really need this education about sentient creatures, I think of the South Side of Chicago where it is not abnormal to lose several people to gun violence each weekend. And that is a normal weekend. Human survival is the name of the game. But several years ago, a couple CPS¹⁴ schools began offering summer remedial programs and brought in shelter dogs for the students to care for. And now with the student having complete domination over something else and caring about something else, attendance and graduation rates are on the rise. So can the farm sanctuary either give scholarships to inner city youth to come out to the sanctuary to spend a week or take elements of the farm sanctuary into the inner city classroom?

We have had inner city kids come to our farms, but there is much more we could do. We have not provided scholarships, but it's worth considering. I like what Bronx Green Machine is doing and would love to partner with them somehow.



I agree because that is the mentality that must be addressed. It's the young people and the people at risk, the most marginalized, the youth – where violence is second nature. In a past presentation, you posed the question of the mentality of those people who work in slaughterhouses on a regular basis; where killing becomes rote or a routine act. Could you compare this mindset to, let's say, a returning war veteran suffering from PTSD?

Absolutely. Farm Sanctuary is a place where traumatized animal victims' lives are transformed. It is also a place where people's lives are transformed, and I would love for us to help heal war veterans and others who have experienced violence and killing. Killing and violence should not be the norm. The sanctuary is a place of healing for animals and people.

¹⁴ Chicago Public Schools.



The farm sanctuaries allow rescued livestock to “live out their natural lives.” Since the sheep are shorn at least once a year, couldn’t the wool be used for making apparel? So many other synthetic alternatives are petroleum-based and/or manufactured overseas in sweatshops, and shipped back along long transportation routes. And other animals used for food do not have to be grain-fed. Cattle could roam and eat drought-resistant prairie grasses. Deer eat the underbrush. Goats eat anything. And upon their natural death, couldn’t the cow hides be used to make products? Even human beings contribute to the wellbeing of others by being organ donors.

We have been careful to demonstrate that these animal are our friends, not our food, and that we regard them as members of our family. The goal is create mutually beneficial relationships with animals, and to provide a positive example for people as our animal friends become ambassadors. People usually want to be kind to animals but don’t think enough about the killing that is needed to put them on the table or about the harms with other industries like dairy, egg, and wool production. When animals are seen primarily as sources of food, fiber, or other products, there is a tendency for the relationship to be exploitive. Is the animal a friend or something else? That’s the key question.



And how about shearing your sheep? This is done here at least once per year?

We have to shear our sheep because they have been bred by the industry to grow a lot of wool. They would overheat and be uncomfortable if we didn’t shear them.



So why couldn’t you use that?

Well, that’s a very interesting question. Technically, that wool does exist. We have been reluctant to use it because we don’t want to set an example of taking anything from the animals. Instead, we spread it out in the field to let birds or other woodland animals gather it for nests and bedding. We did make an exception after the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf when we sent boxes of wool for oil-spill cleanup.



But when you look at our own garment labels many may say, “Made in India” or “Made in Pakistan” or “Made in Costa Rica” ... many of those imported garments involve child labor and a trans-Pacific voyage. So if you already have wool to make garments...

I think that it is important to seek out sustainable alternatives. It is important to research where your clothing comes from and how it was made when living this lifestyle to try and avoid supporting irresponsible, exploitive companies.



And how about the cows that die naturally – could you use their hides?

Once they're dead, there's that body that will be decaying and it will be eaten by someone ... by bugs or by other animals. The challenge with that is, again, the respect for that animal. Using their body parts raises some uneasy questions. And these animals were the few lucky ones that were rescued. We don't look at them as resources, or parts. In a bigger sense, all of our bodies are all ultimately resources that go back into the earth, but the animals at Farm Sanctuary are symbols of something else.



Many people today – especially business students and entrepreneurs seeking to embrace a code of ethics – relate to certain life philosophies. One – as you mentioned at the beginning of this interview – is Utilitarianism. The basic premise of utilitarianism is, as I understand, that “right” actions maximize utility and generate benefits, or, in the alternative, minimize pain and unhappiness. An important aspect of this philosophy is that the interests – and consequences – of all parties involved in a particular situation must be taken into account. Is this a philosophy that could be applied to the rights of animals?

To some extent, yes. It is very pragmatic; it is very logical. Peter Singer has articulated it well and I think he does a good job speaking about prejudices that exist and challenging certain assumptions people have. I'm kind of a hybrid between a utilitarian and the ecofeminist philosophers who see us more as part of a web. Utilitarianism tries to quantify pain and suffering which is pretty hard to do. It seeks to quantify qualitative characteristics, which is challenging. I apply some utilitarian thinking so that if someone is going to eat animals, and if they choose not to eat one species, I understand how not eating chickens means saving more lives than not eating cows since cows are so much bigger with more meat per life. They're very logical. I sometimes apply utilitarian logic in response to the question about whether plants experience suffering by saying that if plants do suffer, the best way to prevent that problem is to eat plants directly because when you eat animals, it requires a lot more plants to be killed to feed the animals. I also respond to that question by saying: if you have children, and you want to teach them about food, taking them to a berry patch to pick strawberries is a very different experience than taking them to a slaughterhouse to watch animals being killed. That

is more of an experiential approach, and less of a utilitarian approach. To me, it really is about relationships and whether they are beneficial or not.



Animal rights activists have often been grouped into one of two camps: animal welfarists ("larger cages") and animal activists ("no cages"). The US Human Society and Temple Grandin have usually been identified as animal welfarists whereas members of PETA¹⁵ have been historically known as animal activists (yet Temple Grandin did win the PETA award in 2004). Do you find yourself gravitating more toward one camp than another?

Personally, I am a vegan and technically an abolitionist. I am also pragmatic and recognize that change takes place over time. When people ask me, are you an animal rights person or an animal welfare person? I say both. I don't think these labels, and the division they've created, are helpful. To me, these issues exist on a continuum, and different people occupy different places on that continuum. One of Farm Sanctuary's values is that we speak to people where they are on their own journeys, and ultimately encourage people to take steps toward compassionate, vegan living. Animals should not be exploited, but they are being exploited. That's the fundamental problem. For the animals who cannot be rescued, less bad (e.g., bigger cages) is better than more bad, and I support efforts to lessen suffering. Small steps often lead to more steps, which can lead to huge changes over time. If someone is eating meat 7 days a week, for example, and they start with a "meatless Monday," that's a good thing. So I look at where somebody is on the journey and the direction they are going, and if they're going in a positive direction, I want to encourage them to continue on that path.



Do you think we go further as several businesses have done and become restorative?

There is the term "sustainable agriculture" and instead it could be "regenerative agriculture." It's just not about sustaining; it's about restoring and improving since we have made such a mess of so many things.



And that appears to be what you are doing. Aim for the top and project restoration. If you set the bar too low, some would say about small changes, "Well, that's good enough."

Every positive step is worth encouraging, while also recognizing that we can do more to create kindness in our world. It's important to empower and inspire, and ultimately to accelerate change.

¹⁵ People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.