

Katherine Douglas

Public Comment - Animal Wellness Action

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From: Joan Hartmann
Sent: Sunday, September 10, 2023 9:57 AM
To: Seifert, Lars; Sarah Aguilar; Chang, Jose; Jacquelyne Alexander
Cc: Mouhanad Hammami; Gina Fischer
Subject: (SAVE) Fw: Cockfighting in Santa Barbara County
Attachments: 3rdSanta Barbara Co Supervisors - Anti-Cockfighting.docx
Categories: Public Comment

Dear Lars, Jose, and Sarah,

This is a powerful letter that underpins the work you are doing on the rooster ordinance. I would like it to be included in the Board packet when it comes back so I am also sending to the Clerk of the Board.

Joan

From: Dr. Thomas Pool <tpool@animalwellnessaction.org>
Sent: Sunday, September 10, 2023 7:58 AM
To: Joan Hartmann <jHartmann@countyofsb.org>
Subject: Cockfighting in Santa Barbara County

Caution: This email originated from a source outside of the County of Santa Barbara. Do not click links or open attachments unless you verify the sender and know the content is safe.

Please find my attached letter. Many thanks, Tom Pool

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September 11, 2023

The Honorable Joan Hartmann
Third District Supervisor
County of Santa Barbara

Dear Supervisor Hartman:

I am Tom Pool, and I am the senior veterinarian for Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy. I grew up on a beef cattle and dairy cattle ranch in southwest Oklahoma and eventually left there to pursue my training in agriculture and then veterinary medicine at Oklahoma State University. I spent 26 years in the U.S. Army, eventually serving as Commander of the U.S. Army Veterinary Command, overseeing a worldwide, tri-service force with 2,500 military personnel. I worked on six of the seven continents, and I was stationed twice in California. I have maintained my California veterinary license for more than 30 years. Your part of the world is very important to me.

Animal agriculture is tremendously important to California's economy. You may not have considered the linkage between cockfighting and animal agriculture, but that linkage is important. One of the greatest challenges to animal agriculture is the wholly inaccurate opinion by some that the industry is fundamentally cruel. I grew up on a small beef/dairy ranch, and my family is still in the beef business. I have devoted my life to protecting animals from suffering, and you can visit our ranch and see that while we raise animals for production, we meet every possible need they have. Our goal is to assure that the animals under our care have just one bad day, and that all of the preceding days are filled with comfort and the satisfying of their core needs. The idea of staging fights between animals for amusement and not for consumption is antithetical to our animal care values. If you believe in animal agriculture, then staged animal fights, whether dogs or rooster, elicit the same revulsion. The greatest threat to animal agriculture is the notion that those of us in agriculture do not care about the animals under our charge. We are animal experts, and when we have a chance to speak out against real animal cruelty, we should do so.

I urge you to support this ordinance as a complement to the valuable state and federal laws on the books to combat cockfighting. These cockfighting operations in Santa Barbara exist to fight animals in your county and to ship them to other jurisdictions to die in fighting pits.

I spent the last 17 years as the Territorial Veterinarian for Guam where cockfighting is not banned under territorial law. But cockfighting is now banned there under federal law, and it's been a federal crime to ship fighting birds to Guam since 2002. Sadly, that law has not been enforced. Guam imported 12,500 fighting birds from the mainland USA during the five years before the recent avian influenza outbreak shut down imports, and California was the second largest exporter of fighting roosters. The ban on private ownership on large numbers of roosters will turn out to be the most effective and efficient deterrent to cockfighting and help us all crack down on this barbaric practice.

If you could witness the appalling cruelty those poor birds are subjected to, you would understand better the people involved in this enterprise and their utter lack of concern for animal welfare and their involvement in organized criminal conduct. In so many cases I've seen that they are intimately tied to illegal gambling, drugs, firearm sales, on and on. Yet they noisily cloak themselves as just another branch of noble animal agriculture. That is a pretense, and any rational person can see right through this charade.

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There are dozens of other important reasons why cockfighting is dangerous for Santa Barbara County. Cruelty to animals. Drug trafficking. Money laundering. Illegal Gambling. The spread of zoonotic diseases. And so many other reasons. So many other counties have taken action, and are planning to take action, against illegal cockfighting. If Santa Barbara doesn't act, it will become a magnet for this sort of criminal conduct. I urge you to take action and replicate Ventura County's excellent ordinance. I stand ready to serve in any way I can to help you advance an important new reform, protecting animals, serving, and defending agriculture, and making Santa Barbara County a better place to live.

I am very grateful for your attention to this important issue.

Thomas Pool, DVM, MPH,
Dipl. American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine
Senior Veterinarian, Animal Wellness Action
Colonel, US Army (ret.)