

Sheila de la Guerra **Public Comment**

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**From:** Desiree Bender <desiree@animalwellnessaction.org>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 8, 2024 4:17 PM  
**To:** sbcob; sakach  
**Subject:** For Distribution to the Board of Supervisors-Jan.9th - Recommendations regarding regulating roosters  
**Attachments:** SantaBarbaraBoardES\_.pdf

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Please see the attached letter for distribution to the Board of Supervisors for public hearing to be held on January 9, 2024, to Consider recommendations regarding an Ordinance Amending Chapter 7 Animals and Fowl, Article I and Adding Article IX, Roosters, to regulate and to limit the number of roosters by parcel size that may be kept on a single premise in Santa Barbara County.

Thank you,

Desiree Bender  
Executive Administrator

animal  
wellness  
action

January 8, 2024

**Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors (via email)**

Supervisor Das Williams, Chair  
Supervisor Steve Lavagnino, Vice Chair  
Supervisor Laura Capps  
Supervisor Joan Hartmann  
Supervisor Bob Nelson

**RE: Recommendations regarding an Ordinance Amending Chapter 7 Animals and Fowl, Article I and Adding Article IX, Roosters, to regulate and to limit the number of roosters by parcel size that may be kept on a single premise in Santa Barbara County.**

Dear Supervisors:

On behalf of Animal Wellness Action and The Center for a Humane Economy, and our members and supporters in Santa Barbara County, I am writing in support of the proposed ordinance to place reasonable limits on the number of roosters that may be kept on a single premise, and efforts to ensure that roosters are treated humanely to minimize the potential for a public nuisance, illegal cockfighting and the raising of birds to be used for cockfighting to protect the public health, safety and welfare.

Animal Wellness Action has documented that cockfighting is surprisingly widespread despite being severely criminalized under state and federal law. It is a particular problem in California where laws against the activity remain comparatively weaker than those of surrounding states. California's current misdemeanor penalties have made our state a virtual magnet for illegal cockfighting operations. That problem has been compounded by our long border with Mexico, with illegal trafficking of fighting birds from that country into the United States. Cartels in Mexico have a major role in the trafficking of these animals for fights.

The complaints we have received run the gamut, from people who have been intimidated by threats of violence for complaining to authorities about suspected criminal activity to property owners and real estate professionals who have complained about declining property values and difficulties finding buyers for properties located in areas where gamecocks are raised due to the noise they generate and associated criminal activities.

Please understand this is not simply an issue of urbanites unaccustomed to the sights, sounds, and odors common to rural areas where livestock are commonly kept. Many of the complaints are from people who have raised livestock and owned horses for years, and who aren't bothered by the occasional crowing of a rooster.

That, however, is quite a different picture from what we are seeing now in many areas of the state. The fact is, most people, whether they live in the city or in a rural area, don't want to live next door to someone who is involved in a cruel and illegal activity. They don't want their children exposed to this or the other criminal elements that tend to go hand-in-hand with such activity. They don't want to be threatened or intimidated for reporting suspected criminal activity to law enforcement. They don't want

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to be assaulted by the constant crowing commonly associated with gamecock operations. And they don't want to see their property values decline for all these reasons.

Cockfighting is associated with illegal gambling, drug trafficking, illegal weapons, and homicides. Law enforcement has documented the strong connection between cockfighting and these other forms of crime. The Drug Enforcement Administration has documented that cockfights are used as networking opportunities by drug traffickers. Cockfighting comes with social costs beyond animal cruelty. The presence of young children at cockfights is especially disturbing and promotes an enthusiasm for violence and lack of respect for the law. In Mexico, in a recent case of gang violence, there were 20 people massacred at a cockfighting derby, including one Chicago-based mother and her sister badly wounded at the event. In Hawaii, early last year, there was a mass shooting at a cockfight that left two dead and three wounded. If law enforcement wants to root out a wide range of crimes in a community, one of the best things officers can do is shut down cockfighting venues, since they are gathering places for organized criminals.

Finally, cockfighting is tied to the spread of avian diseases, with California dramatically affected. Gamefowl are high-risk disease vectors and reservoirs because they are widely sold and traded, deliberately mixed under stressful conditions at cockfighting derbies, reared under poor biosecurity, and employ husbandry or fighting practices that spread disease.

The Center for a Humane Economy released a [comprehensive 63-page report](#) on the links between cockfighting and avian influenza and virulent Newcastle Disease (see link above). There have been 15 introductions of vND into the United States since 1950, 10 of which occurred via the illegal smuggling of gamecocks across the southern border from Mexico. Virulent Newcastle disease is endemic in Mexico and all of Latin America. Just three of those outbreaks cost the federal government (i.e., U.S. taxpayers) more than \$1 billion to bring under control.

You may hear from opponents that most of the roosters are being raised for "show" purposes. This is a masquerade. Many cockfighters show some of their gamefowl as a front for their illegal activities. This is a strategy that has long been promoted by the United Gamefowl Breeders Association (UGBA), a cockfighting trade group, and its various state affiliates (see [Animals & Politics: The Front Group Behind Cockfighting Criminals \(typepad.com\)](#)). For example, in her July 2002 column in *The Feathered Warrior* (a now defunct cockfighting magazine), UGBA's Director of Administration Sandy Johnson advised readers that they may be able to avoid prosecution for "ownership of gamefowl for fighting purposes" by attending gamefowl shows and amassing a collection of gamefowl show "ribbons, plaques, [and] certificates." Johnson noted that "[a] recent case where one member was charged with ownership of gamefowl for fighting purposes was won because the member used show ribbons and certificates from gamefowl breeder shows."

It's also worth mentioning that Ms. Johnson was also co-owner of a now shuttered illegal cock pit called the "Deer Creek" pit along with her husband Ray Johnson on their Ohio property.

While a number of UGBA's officers and directors have had similar connections to cockfighting and illegal cock pits, the backgrounds of the officers and directors of the state affiliates is just as interesting. For example, the past president of the California APG Manuel Costa appeared in the 2002 documentary film entitled "Cockfight" by Tiller Russell and Loren Mendell. During the first ten minutes of the

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documentary, Costa states that he is a cockfighter and talks about his love for the sport. He then goes on to spar two roosters on his property. One of the roosters had an eye knocked out as a result of the demonstration. The film then shows Costa at an illegal cockfighting derby on the outskirts of Sacramento where he is shown making bets and coaching participants on how to elude law enforcement. Adults and children are shown gambling on the outcome of the fights, and Costa is shown asking participants for donations to the APG saying, "The Association needs help. We spend a lot of money to help you guys. Help us back."

During the UGBA's 2009 Annual Convention held in Ontario, California in cooperation with the APG, materials were handed out advising rooster owners to "Make your operation part of a 4H or FFA project. If you don't have children, sponsor a relative, friend or neighbor. There are exemptions in county codes for 4H and FFA projects." That same document advised operators to "Set up your operation as a commercial operation that sells eggs, poultry for meat and also as show birds."

In the Winter 2014 issue of The Gamefowl Journal, former APG President and current UGBA Executive Board Member Bucky Harless complained about rooster limiting ordinances. Harless, who is also the current APG Secretary/Treasurer, is an admitted cockfighter (see The Gamefowl Journal - A Visit With Bucky Harless, page 54).

The APG was, in 2023, the largest donor to a cockfighting political action committee formed in Oklahoma to try to decriminalize cockfighting. That effort failed badly but it serves to confirm the intentions and purpose of this organization.

We urge you not to be misled by opponent's claims that large numbers of roosters are needed for show purposes. We urge you to add Santa Barbara County to the growing list of counties that have already enacted similar ordinances including Los Angeles, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Benito, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sutter, Ventura, and Yuba counties.

Sincerely,



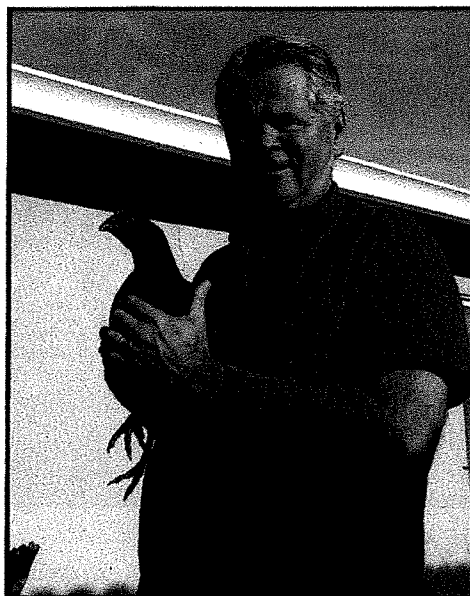
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Please see below insert from Winter 2014 Issue of Game Fowl Journal, "A Visit with Buck Harless".

## A Visit With Bucky Harless

by Lino Zuniga

Early November I had a chance to visit with Bucky Harless, the president of the California APG. He always had respect for game fowl. It was 1964 when he contacted a New Jersey breeder advertising in a game fowl magazine, and purchased an Asil stag that was later stolen. After that a classmate (high school) got his Dad to gift a pair of Mugs and a Harry Charles red hen and later purchased Raja Murgh Asil and other oriental game fowl strains. It was in the early 70's when he decided to move north to the beautiful state of Oregon, where cockfighting was still legal. Bucky preferred to fight his gamecocks in the gaff, doing most of his cockfighting at the Curtain Pit and the Oakland Pit. It was only a few years of enjoying his rights when



out the years he has held the secretary and vice president position before earning his position as president of the APG.

I asked Bucky what's his goal as president of the California APG? His response was "our main concern at APG is to stop our rights from being taken by being proactive in anyway, and attempt to regain the rights we once had, and to keep the poultry shows going for anyone involved in raising game fowl. Another goal is to keep people informed about the laws. Zoning laws are putting lot's of game farms out of commission. There's certain places where people can have as many game hens as they want but no more than 5 gamecocks. People have to know what zone they're in and

cockfighting became illegal, and moved back home to California. It was then when he became a member of the APG, going to meeting and getting involved in poultry shows.

It was in 1984 when he asked Joe Z "what is the UGBA going to do for me?" Joe Z replied "what are you doing for the UGBA?", that changed his level of involvement in the APG starting his position as director. Through

Bucky Harless with a black Oriental pullet

what the laws are there and what they can do about them. A major thing is the spectator bill passed and some are not aware of it and the consequence's. For example if a parent or guardian is responsible for a child 16 years of age or younger present at a cockfight is subject to a \$300,000.00 fine". ■

Do your part and get organized. Join your state GBA, the UGBA and the AGDN today!