

What is animal rights?

Most people erroneously believe animal welfare laws prevent mistreatment of nonhuman animals. Nothing could be further from the truth. For decades, a small number of animal advocates have recognized that those laws permit any mistreatment of animals deemed to further even trivial human interests and only meaningful legal rights have the potential to provide real protection.

Nonhuman animals' **sentience** – their capacity to feel pain and experience their lives – necessitates meaningful, enforceable legal rights that will establish interspecies boundaries human beings may not cross. Those rights will eventually end human exploitation and abuse of nonhuman animals and **their property status** that today ensures suffering on an almost unimaginable scale.

Animal rights advocates understand that early human violations of interspecies boundaries and domination of other animals and their reproduction led to human slavery and other gross injustices by some people against others. **Speciesist, racist, misogynist, and other oppressive ideologies** rationalized and institutionalized those practices. Establishing nonhuman animals' rights will help expand human rights, equality, and wellbeing.

☞ **Animal rights will improve our health.**

Nutrition research finds fats, proteins, and cholesterol from nonhuman animals' flesh, milk & eggs to be leading causes of heart disease, stroke, and some cancers. Flesh, milk & eggs in the diet are also a crucial factor in Americans' out-of-control weight gain, leading to other serious health problems, including type-2 diabetes. Chronic diseases and pharmaceuticals used to treat them drive

the soaring costs of medical treatment & insurance. Domination of the food business and large advertising & public-relations budgets have long enabled the flesh & milk industries to **mislead the public** about healthful nutrition.

Pandemics like influenza originate with violations of natural boundaries between humans and other animals. It is no accident that “bird flu” has public health officials scrambling: If not for needless human exploitation of chickens and other birds, we would not face this looming, fearsome problem. Anthrax, smallpox, and other infectious diseases also jumped to humans from other animals – before we knew better than to act like omnivores when we are not.

When nonhuman animals have legal rights, people will not be able to consume their flesh, milk & eggs. Cutting out advertising and other social pressure to consume them will help us all live healthfully on fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and whole grains – as recommended by leading nutritionists and more natural to our species. Medical & insurance costs should drop, absent price gouging.

☞ **Animal rights will benefit ecosystems and conservation.**

Raising animals for food, using land in ways that harm wildlife, and other human practices injurious to nonhuman animals are linked to Earth's and humanity's most serious ecological problems: pollution, global warming, species extinctions, intensifying hurricanes, rapid fresh water and topsoil loss, food shortages, rainforest and wetland destruction, “too many” of some animals where people don't want them, the spread of Lyme disease, the reemergence of malaria, and more.

Current efforts to protect “the environment” are failing.

Basic resources such as topsoil and fresh water are becoming increasingly scarce as the human population continues to grow and technology runs rampant. Raising animals for food – including growing crops to feed them – uses far more topsoil, water, and oil than farming to fill people's stomachs. When agriculture began, about 5 million people existed on Earth. Today, about 165 times that number are malnourished.

We cannot solve these and other ecological & conservation problems as long as we fail to establish basic legal rights for nonhuman animals.

☞ **Animal rights will help prevent war, genocide, and poverty.**

Human beings naturally protect and assist each other unless moved by mental illness, desperation, or false teaching to attack other people. Despots and demagogues typically move people to attack by designating others as enemies and demonizing them as nonhuman animals historically considered harmful – parasites, rats, vermin, cockroaches, venomous snakes, and others.

Acts of war such as bombing and destroying an enemy's crops and other resources kill, injure, and degrade habitat of nonhuman animals as well.

Ending speciesism and human supremacy and establishing animal rights and all sentient beings' inherent worth will help end genocide and war.

Despite long-standing conflicts based on religion, ethnicity, race, and nationality, conflicts over resources are almost always a cause of war. Animal rights and an end to animal exploitation will reduce conflict

over scarce resources. Equitably and humanely reducing the human population will also ease pressure on resources and simultaneously reduce harm to nonhuman animals.

For millennia, raising cattle has fostered **poverty** by driving plant farmers off their land, reducing the land's fertility, and concentrating Earth's wealth in the hands of the few by channeling it through large animals owned by the few.

Topsoil loss due to cattle grazing and producing feed crops for cattle, chickens, pigs and other animals diminishes Earth's wealth, concentrates farmland in the hands of the few leaving less for healthful agricultural production, and ensures **high food prices**.

People with precarious finances who consume flesh, milk & eggs are more likely to become poor through ill health, related expenses, and the difficulty of working steadily. Costly diseases like those caused by flesh, milk & egg consumption are linked to large numbers of mortgage foreclosures.

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Once these matters are well understood, most people will agree animal rights is what America needs most!

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Selected Sources

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- ☞ *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* by Charles Patterson
- ☞ *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* by Marion Nestle
- ☞ *An Introduction to Animal Rights* by Gary Francione
- ☞ *Man the Hunted* by Donna Hart and Robert W. Sussman
- ☞ *Resource Wars and Blood and Oil* by Michael T. Klare

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Responsible Policies for Animals, Inc. a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit organization, shows people how to establish meaningful, enforceable legal rights for nonhuman animals. Donations to RPA are tax deductible as allowed by law. Basic RPA membership is \$15. Members receive the newsletter Thin Ice.

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April 2006

Animal Rights: What America Needs Most

From
Responsible Policies for Animals, Inc.
www.RPAforAll.org

America sometimes helps lead the world in expanding individual rights. But so far there is little progress toward legal rights for nonhuman animals, despite those animals' enormous suffering.*

Many people assume advocating for animal rights means not caring about people. But failing to establish animal rights is hurting people.

Meaningful, enforceable legal rights for nonhuman animals – the goal of the animal rights movement and Responsible Policies for Animals – will benefit the vast majority of people.

* That name accurately includes all of South, Central & North America. RPA uses it referring to the United States here for simplicity.