

Jessee Kuhar “Brazil, the Bill, and the Will – To Change.”

Brazil is the seventh largest economy for Gross Domestic Product, and eighth largest in purchasing power parity. The Brazilian economy is growing, but so is the occurrence of animal cruelty in Brazil. Agriculture is a central facet of Brazil’s expanding economy, and in times of economic growth, animal rights are overlooked. However, “what goes around, comes around,” and all too often cruel actions come back to haunt those who commit them. In North America, this was seen with the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) scare of 2003. This was a clear example of poor agricultural practices harming animals and leading to the infection of people with the life-endangering human form of BSE. Brazil’s atmosphere of animal abuse, lack of regulations and lack of enforcement are much worse than what North America faced. It is a frightening but very real possibility that Brazil could experience a similar catastrophic agricultural event - unless their agricultural practices are remedied. Brazil’s agricultural practices are often cruel and inhumane to their domesticated animals, as well as detrimental to local flora and fauna. Animal protection laws need to be modernized. Although laws can be modernized, it is more difficult to reform a culture that lacks sufficient technology and economic motivation.

Brazil may have the economy of a developed country, but its agricultural practices are in some ways third world. The cultures and traditions of the Brazilian people have been passed from generation to generation, as have their farming techniques. The former is timeless and integral to their society; the latter is out-dated and rendered obsolete in the modern world. Farming practices encroach upon the Cerrado savannah, the most diverse savannah in the world, and the Amazon rainforest, home to many rare species. Brazilian farmers, in their haste to expand and increase production, harm the ecosystems around them. Wild animals are brutally slaughtered; land is cleared of all vegetation. Land is used to grow a variety of crops such as juice oranges (of which Brazil is the world’s largest exporter). Newly cleared land is often used as pasture for horses, pigs, or cattle.

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Cattle make up the majority of Brazil’s livestock and Brazil is one of the world’s biggest beef exporters. To meet rising demands, Brazilian producers churn out more and more cattle, and the quality of life these animals enjoy plummets dramatically. Most of Brazil lacks adequately trained and certified veterinarians and veterinary supplies. This means that when an animal becomes ill or injured, it goes untreated. Brazilian farmers may argue that this is just an example of nature taking its course, but the fact is, when an animal is domesticated, we are responsible for meeting that animal’s needs. Animals suffer and are left in agony to die if they have difficulty giving birth, become lame, or become riddled with parasites. In addition to traditional practices, some new methods have emerged, however rather than improving the treatment of animals it is instead contributing to the suffering of Brazilian livestock. One of these practices is the use of artificial growth hormones. Synthesized Hormones are injected into livestock to increase their growth rate, thereby reducing the time needed to feed the animal before slaughter. These synthetic hormones are unnatural and introducing them into our food sources means they eventually wind up on the plates of consumers in the meat from these animals. Studies have linked eating this tainted meat to physical deformities in children including causing babies to grow breasts, tumours, and various other genital deformities – what can we infer about the effects on the health of the animals who were injected with these concoctions? These animals are being pumped with nearly ten times the amount of hormones a human would encounter in his or her lifetime. Clearly this is neither ethical, nor humane. Brazil does not adequately enforce its own regulations on the use of these hormones meaning that animals are subjected to cruel, undue pain and unnatural growth. Brazil has agreed to ship hormone-free meat to the European Union, but they cannot follow through on such an offer when they cannot verify the beef is in fact hormone free or not. In place of these hormones there should be a movement towards healthy, wholesome food sources for these animals to enhance their natural growth rates and to benefit their natural health. Currently the synthetic hormones are banned but producers still manage to smuggle them in, often at a lower cost to the farmer than providing an

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animal with its natural dietary needs over its longer, natural life span. There are benefits for both the animals and consumers when natural feeding programs are implemented – happy healthy animals, happy healthy consumers, and respect for the natural order. It is simply the right thing to do.

The right thing to do and the easy thing to do are rarely, if ever, the same thing. This certainly holds true in Brazil’s case. The country does have laws concerning animal rights, but they, like their technologies, are old and out-dated. Many of them haven’t been revised since the early 1900’s. Many more regulations are never enforced, as this responsibility falls to municipal governments where it is more likely that the local customs, traditions, and economic realities of poverty will hold more sway over the actions of local agricultural producers. For example, the traditional rodeo, a central part of Brazil’s agricultural lifeblood, was outlawed in the city of Sao Paulo in 1993, as the city recognised that it involved public displays of animal cruelty. Under pressure from the local population and after great difficulty enforcing it, the law was scrapped in 1999, and replaced with a law that simply “regulated” the sport. These small town rodeos are much different from the carefully orchestrated and televised events North American citizens are accustomed to. Brazilian rodeos are not regulated by the same standards that televised rodeos are, as they are usually comparatively small, local events. Animals are whipped, beaten, ridden, restrained, electrically stunned, and often even killed. It is “great fun” for the humans, but a cruel injustice for the animals that we are supposed to care for. There is only one Brazilian law that makes animal cruelty a criminal offence. It truly came as a shock when the Brazilian National Congress proposed Bill 4548 in early 2010 to decriminalize violence against domestic and domesticated animals. Instead of jail sentences and fines for animal abuse, punishment would be nonexistent. The potential for increase in animal abuse would be staggering. It is a glaring example of the cruel attitude that the Brazilian nation has in regard to animal treatment that their government even considered such an inhumane Bill. Currently the bill is ‘on hold’ after the Brazilian National Congress received a multitude of petitions and protests from humane organizations including the World Society for the Protection of

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Animals, Change.org and Care2. The bill has not yet been defeated; it was scheduled for reconsideration in late 2010. Due to its very controversial nature, progress has been slow and it remains on hold as of now. This is perhaps the most immediate danger to animal welfare in Brazil today. If this bill passes, all of the abuses previously mentioned will be condoned and perpetuated. Brazil's proposed Bill 4548 is the single largest threat to animal welfare in Brazil today.

In closing, it is clear that Brazil's agricultural sector needs to make some major changes when it comes to animal rights. There are so many compassionate solutions out there; all it takes is determination. Laws need to consider animal rights, and be consistently enforced. Animals deserve a life that is natural and hormone-free. Animals deserve wholesome food and protection from cruel and unusual sporting events. Brazil needs to open its eyes before it's too late. The effort that has been put into delaying bill 4548 is admirable, but more such action is needed. The global community must act. If the world comes together to draw attention to this issue, bill 4548 wouldn't just be delayed, it would be thrown out and done with, once and for all. Animal rights are an issue largely ignored, though we rely on animals every day. They are owed just as much respect as our fellow human beings. Animal abuse is morally wrong. The Golden Rule says "treat others as you would like to be treated". It's the least we can do for our earth partners – the animals.

Citations

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