

The State of the Economy and Animal Welfare

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The economic depression affects more than just the human population. Unemployed people find it harder to feed their pets, and so animal shelters in depressed areas must take in more than their usual burden of dogs *for* adoption and destruction. Cases of animal neglect and cruelty increase as families disintegrate emotionally: the increased incidence of animal and child abuse is one

tragic consequence of economic and psychological depression.

The hungry and unemployed in the cities have, at least, their soup lines, but not so *for* those in the depressed rural areas. Here, trapping of furbearers, such as muskrat and raccoon, is on the upswing, as is the hunting and poaching of deer. The negative impact on the environment of this trend is further intensified by

recently formed "survivalist" organizations, made up of people who spend their weekends learning to live off the land by hunting, fishing, and trapping, a pastime that furnishes them with an outlet for coping with the *angst* of possible nuclear war.

And down on the "factory" farm, animals are being subjected to even greater stress and distress, as they are crowded together even more "intensively" to offset farmers' shrinking profits and rising debts. In some instances, poultry have starved because farmers have not been able to pay their feed bills; cattle in Texas have been allowed to starve to death, too, but their demise is summarily written off as a tax loss.

The affluent continue to cling to the entropy-accelerating lifestyle and consumer habits that they so cherish, and have come to perceive as inalienable rights: **for** example, the right to wear furs and to eat meat, regardless of the extent of animal suffering involved and the waste of non-renewable environmental resources.

An economic depression inevitably means that the under-privileged are compelled to suffer, but the plight of animals during "hard times" is often overlooked. Further, the present administration's budget cuts, and the pro-industry policies expressed by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of the Interior, in conjunction with the attempted financial emasculation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (responsible for enforcing the Animal Welfare Act), all add insult to injury. Clearly, in such difficult economic times, the needs of people will inevitably take precedence over those of animals. But a society that *unconditionally* places the rights and interests of humans over those of animals and the quality of the environment, on the grounds of a short-term (near-sighted) version of economic necessity, not only

lacks enlightened self-interest, but is also providing the critical impetus for its own eventual nemesis. Hence, there is an even greater need today for humane education and the promulgation of animal welfare principles and the animal and environmental rights philosophies. However, we see that "economic recovery," improved farm and laboratory animal welfare, and environmental quality are considered as exclusive and even contradictory goals under the present administration. But can we continue to pay the ever-higher costs of sacrificing environmental quality and animals' welfare in order to promote the tunnel-vision goal of industrial "recovery"?

The United States' aggressive competition in the world agricultural market can mean a further decrement in farm animal welfare and environmental protection standards, just so we can gain a competitive edge over other countries. Similar economic incentives also mean that more animals are being trapped for their fur for export; more are used in biomedical research to find profitable "cures;" and more deadly pesticides are being developed for sale abroad. The State Department is even considering lifting restrictions on the export of some human drugs and agrichemicals that have been judged too hazardous to have been used in this country.

In conclusion, the present economic situation is eroding the ethical principles of egalitarian democracy. But at the same time, its sad effect on animals is also stimulating greater concern for animal rights and welfare, and environmental protection. People are coming to realize that animal, human, and environmental well-being are inseparable and interconnected. An economy and industrial system that ignores these spiritual, ethical, and ecological interconnections will suffer the consequence: industrial self-destruction.