

**For immediate release:**

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## **Public Interest Coalition Challenges Constitutionality of Iowa's Ag-Gag Law**

*Advocates for Animals, Workers, Free Speech and Food Safety Take on Agricultural Giants,  
Following Victories in Utah and Idaho*

**DES MOINES, Iowa** – Today a coalition of public interest groups and journalists led by the Animal Legal Defense Fund, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Iowa, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the Center for Food Safety and Public Justice, filed a lawsuit in Iowa challenging the constitutionality of the state's Ag-Gag law. The law criminalizes undercover investigations at factory farms and slaughterhouses, effectively silencing advocates and ensuring animal cruelty, unsafe food safety practices, environmental hazards, and inhumane working conditions go unreported. The coalition argues Iowa's Ag-Gag law violates the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution, which grant freedom of speech and the right to equal protection under the law. Federal courts have already struck down Ag-Gag laws in Idaho and Utah as unconstitutional.

Iowa is one of the largest states for industrial animal agriculture. Iowa is by far the country's biggest producer of pigs raised for meat and hens raised for eggs. More than 20 million pigs and 45 million egg-laying hens are raised in Iowa each year, with tens of millions more cows, chickens, turkeys, and goats raised in the state. The vast majority of these animals are raised on factory farms, subject to intensive confinement, routine mutilations, and deplorable conditions.

The central objective of Iowa's Ag-Gag law is to prevent whistleblowers from collecting information about these facilities and distributing that information to the public. The animal agriculture industry lobbies to pass these laws in order to hide cruel practices and violations of laws designed to protect animals, employees and consumers. Iowa's Ag-Gag law has succeeded in hindering free speech and stamping out exposés of the industry. In the years leading up to the passage of the law in 2012, there were at least ten undercover investigations of factory farms in Iowa. Since the law's passage, there have been zero.

Undercover investigations are one of the few ways for the public to receive critical information about animal agriculture operations. A 2012 consumer survey conducted by Purdue University's Department of Agricultural Economics and Department of Animal Sciences found that the public relies on the information gathered and presented by animal protection groups and investigative journalists more than they rely on industry groups and the government combined.

"Iowa is trampling civil liberties for the benefit of an industry," says Animal Legal Defense Fund Executive Director Stephen Wells. "Each American has a right to know what goes on at factory farms—especially in Iowa, which is the second highest state in agricultural production and the source of nearly a third of the country's pigs."

“Iowa’s unconstitutional Ag-Gag law tries to punish speech without any proof of any injury to the agricultural facility it seeks to protect. There’s a reason that federal courts have been striking these laws down as a violation of the free speech rights of groups like our clients,” says Rita Bettis, ACLU of Iowa legal director. “Ag-Gag laws seek to carve out restrictions on undercover news-gathering and other forms of speech that are specific to a single industry in violation of the First Amendment.”

Copies of the complaint are available upon request.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit are the Animal Legal Defense Fund, the Iowa Center for Public Affairs Journalism, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, Bailing Out Benji, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Center for Food Safety.

For more information please visit [aldf.org/ag-gag](http://aldf.org/ag-gag).

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### **About the Animal Legal Defense Fund**

The Animal Legal Defense Fund was founded in 1979 to protect the lives and advance the interests of animals through the legal system. To accomplish this mission, the Animal Legal Defense Fund files high-impact lawsuits to protect animals from harm; provides free legal assistance and training to prosecutors to assure that animal abusers are punished for their crimes; supports tough animal protection legislation and fights harmful legislation; and provides resources and opportunities to law students and professionals to advance the emerging field of animal law. For more information, please visit [aldf.org](http://aldf.org).

### **About PETA**

Founded in 1980, PETA is the largest animal rights organization in the world, with more than five million members and supporters worldwide. PETA uses public education, cruelty investigations, celebrity involvement, protest campaigns, and other innovative tactics to spread the message that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or to abuse in any other way. For more information, please visit [PETA.org](http://PETA.org).

### **About Center for Food Safety**

Center for Food Safety’s mission is to empower people, support farmers, and protect the earth from the harmful impacts of industrial agriculture. Through groundbreaking legal, scientific, and grassroots action, we protect and promote your right to safe food and the environment. Please join our more than 900,000 consumer and farmer advocates across the country at [centerforfoodsafety.org](http://centerforfoodsafety.org). Twitter: [@CFSTrueFood](https://twitter.com/CFSTrueFood), [@CFS\\_Press](https://twitter.com/CFS_Press)

### **About the ACLU of Iowa**

The ACLU of Iowa is a private, non-partisan organization that fights to advance civil liberties for all. It is the state affiliate of the national American Civil Liberties Union. The ACLU prides itself in

upholding everyone's civil liberties, no matter who they are or what they believe. We work to assure the rights of all Iowans—from atheists to devout Christians, from labor unions to businesspeople and more—to make sure the constitutional rights of all are preserved. For more information, please go to [www.aclu-ia.org](http://www.aclu-ia.org).

**About Public Justice**

Public Justice pursues high impact lawsuits to combat social and economic injustice, protect the Earth's sustainability, and challenge predatory corporate conduct and government abuses. For more information, visit [www.PublicJustice.net](http://www.PublicJustice.net).