

POLICY NOTE

Key Findings

1. Recent ballot initiatives in Colorado and Oregon would criminalize hunting, fishing, and the raising of livestock. These ballot initiatives have the potential to disassociate children with where their food comes from.
2. Ballot initiatives that seek to inflict the petitioner's worldview on an entire state often have unintended consequences.
3. Criminalizing the harvesting of meat would make adults involved in homesteading, hunting, fishing, 4-H, and FFA guilty of providing experiential learning for youth and a misdemeanor.
4. Criminalizing activities that are already prohibited under state law only hurts the people who are already following the law.
5. Hunting and fishing are often generational traditions.
6. Meat consumption can contribute to a healthy diet.
7. Meat production provides an abundant, nutrient-dense protein source for low-income families.

Radical ballot proposals in Western states would criminalize meat production, reduce healthy food sources, and harm public health

By Pam Lewison, Director, Initiative on Agriculture

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Introduction

Meat is central to many family meals and is a cornerstone for some of the biggest holiday observances in the United States. Fourth of July BBQs, turkey with a Thanksgiving feast, and beef during winter holidays are all examples of the relationship people have with meat. Not only does meat provide essential nutrients that are harder to find in vegetarian or vegan diets, but it also provides an inexpensive protein source for low-income families.¹

Meat is a core contributor to human health. Meat is a good source of iron, which provides hemoglobin and enables oxygen circulation throughout the body. Meat provides essential minerals and vitamins during pregnancy, promoting healthy brain, organ, and muscle development. Meat provides zinc, omega-3 fatty acids, and selenium, which support tissue connection and a strong cardiovascular system.

Meat is a natural source of vitamin B-12, which is essential to the body's ability to absorb nutrients. A diet moderate in meat helps the body store vitamin D and promotes bone strength, growth, and density. Meat is a key source of protein, promoting muscle development, physical mobility and healthy skin, the body's primary barrier against disease.

The raising and harvesting of meat often are a generational experiential learning opportunity. Hunting in the autumnal months usually includes parents and children scouting the land for game; a tradition with its roots in Native American and Western pioneer cultures.² In many cases, hunting is still observed as a rite of passage for children by bringing them closer to where their food comes from.

Similarly, the raising of livestock by families is often a generational endeavor that emphasizes conscious animal husbandry and gratitude for the food the livestock provide. Livestock raised for meat, spend the first seven to 12 months of their lives on the ranches where they are born.³ Approximately 96 percent of farms and ranches in the United States are owned by families, meaning most livestock raised for meat spends up

1 Whitman, Sarah. "Vegetarian vs. Omnivores Facts." *Live Strong*. Accessed Aug. 10, 2021. <https://www.livestrong.com/article/463516-vegetarian-vs-omnivores-facts/>

2 Blanchfield, Patrick. "What Makes Hunting So Divisive?" *The New Republic*. Aug. 23, 2018. Accessed Aug. 10, 2021. <https://newrepublic.com/article/150848/makes-hunting-divisive>.

3 Manning, Lauren. "5 Tips for Finishing Cattle on Grass." *Successful Farming*. March 3, 2019. Accessed Aug. 10, 2021. <https://www.agriculture.com/livestock/cattle/to-capitalize-on-the-grass-fed-beef-craze-proper-finishing-is-key>.

to the first year of its life in the care of a family.⁴ Modern, humane practices and changes in cultural attitudes have consistently improved the treatment of animals raised for food.

Activism Ballot Measures

Some activists, however, want to reduce the availability of meat as a healthy source of nutrition.

Two recent ballot measures in Western states have emerged that would alter the way in which families engage in generational activities and lead to an increase in the cost of meat production and purchase. In Colorado, the “Protect Animals from Unnecessary Suffering and Exploitation” or PAUSE Act was proposed as a ballot initiative to revise animal rights laws in the state.⁵ The ballot initiative would have prohibited the harvesting of animals before “one quarter of their lifespan based on species, breed, and type of animal” had been lived.

It also would have criminalized common breeding practices often used on farms and ranches. The initiative was struck down by the Colorado State Supreme Court before making it to the ballot for a violation of the state’s single-subject legislation rule with a unanimous vote of the justices recognizing the harvesting of livestock for meat and their breeding are not connected.⁶

A similar ballot measure has been introduced in Oregon: IP-13, called the “Abuse, Neglect, and Assault Exemption Modification and Improvement Act.”⁷ It seeks to make artificial insemination of livestock a felony; would ban hunting, fishing, and rodent control; and would redefine “animal abuse” misdemeanor classifications by removing “otherwise authorized by law” and replacing it with “necessary to defend him or herself against apparent threat of immediate violence.”

Oregon’s IP-13 was approved by the Oregon Secretary of State for circulation July 15. Initiative sponsors have until July 2022 to gather just over 112,000 certified signatures to get the initiative on the ballot for November 2022.

Ramifications of activist legislation

State ballot initiatives like those filed in Colorado and Oregon have a singular agenda at their core: to criminalize the consumption of meat by making its production and harvesting a criminal act. The Colorado ballot initiative was not struck down by the Colorado Supreme Court for its content but rather because it tried to make a connection between breeding practices and the harvesting of livestock for meat. The Oregon ballot initiative would go further by applying

4 Family Farms. U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Accessed Aug. 10, 2021. <https://nifa.usda.gov/family-farms>.

5 Colorado State Ballot Initiative: Protect Animals from Unnecessary Suffering and Exploitation. Accessed Aug. 10, 2021. https://c2d66864-9c4e-4475-8d58-9a685a26bf17.filesusr.com/ugd/21ab33_44de84044af94542a28830bb359897cb.pdf.

6 Ashby, Charles. “High court strikes down proposed Pause Act.” The Daily Sentinel. June 22, 2021. Accessed Aug. 10, 2021. https://www.gjsentinel.com/news/western_colorado/high-court-strikes-down-proposed-pause-act/article_329a2a00-d2d0-11eb-a81a-cf33126dce80.html.

7 Oregon State Ballot Initiative: Abuse, Neglect, and Assault Exemption Modification and Improvement Act. Accessed Aug. 1, 2021. <http://oregonvotes.org/irr/2022/013text.pdf>.

criminalization of virtually any activity in which livestock, game, or domestic animals may be involved.

The Oregon ballot initiative would potentially criminalize the use of animals in rodeos and in scientific research; criminalize rodent and pest control; mark anyone who ever mercifully euthanized a dying animal as a criminal, and potentially ban the use of safe and accepted breeding practices for farmers and ranchers throughout the state. The overreaching nature of the ballot initiative highlights the disconnection between the authors of the initiative and communities which regularly interact with wild game and livestock.

Modern homesteading has taken root in various places around the United States, including Oregon.⁸ With no exact count of the number of people homesteading – or living off-grid – and raising their own livestock for food, it is difficult to quantify how many people would be affected by the meat harvest portion of the ballot initiative. Anecdotally, the appeal of homesteading is that it is an answer to the rising costs of food, power, and other resources. Homesteading is a family endeavor and includes the raising of livestock for their ability to provide fertilizer, eggs, milk, and meat for their owners. However, the harvesting of livestock for meat is a part of homesteading that also often involves children. Under the ballot initiative, any parent who harvests livestock in front of a minor would be committing a misdemeanor and risk fines, jail time, or both.

Homesteaders are not the only adults who would potentially be subject to criminal charges under the Oregon ballot initiative. Adults who acted as 4-H leaders or FFA advisors would also be subject to criminal charges for supervising learning activities including artificial insemination of livestock or harvesting of meat. The initiative could effectively cut off the generational learning experiences of children from adults involved in farming and ranching.

Other generational practices would not be spared under the ballot initiative: hunting, fishing, and trapping would also be considered criminal acts. Oregon does not currently require a fishing license for children under age 11 if they are accompanied by an adult. By criminalizing the ability of adults to harvest meat, including fish, the ballot initiative would render the handing down of generational traditions like fishing obsolete because teaching a child how to properly kill a caught fish or game animal would be a crime.

Initiative efforts in Washington

There are no current proposals for ballot initiatives broaching the subject in Washington state. However, the effect of such an initiative in Washington would have the potential to affect approximately 36,000 farms and ranches not to mention numerous families who hunt, fish, and raise small livestock at their homes.⁹ Slightly less than 10 percent of Washington state's residents lived below the federal poverty line in 2019, making access to nutrient-dense and affordable food

8 Bayly, Julia. "How to start homesteading in Oregon." *Hello Homestead*. Dec. 19, 2019. Accessed Aug. 10, 2021. <https://hellohomestead.com/how-to-start-homesteading-in-oregon/>.

9 U.S. Department of Agriculture 2017 Census of Agriculture. Historical Highlights: 2017 and Earlier Census Years. Accessed Aug. 23, 2021. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Washington/st53_1_0001_0001.pdf.



Pam Lewison is the Director for the Washington Policy Center Initiative on Agriculture and is based in the Tri-Cities office. She farms in Eastern Washington and is a tireless advocate for agriculture both in Washington state and around the country. Before entering the public policy world, Pam spent nearly a decade as a journalist in the Northwest and got her feet wet as the coordination clerk for the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program. She holds a Master of Science from Texas A&M University and a Bachelor of Arts from Washington State University.

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of extreme importance to those residents.¹⁰ Ballot initiatives like those in Colorado and Oregon put the most poverty-stricken in Washington state and other Western states at the greatest risk of not being able to afford to feed their families nutritious meals.

Conclusion

Narrow-minded views of communities different from one's own should be the genesis for discussion and a desire for a better understanding of a different way of life. In fact, in an era in which everyone is purportedly encouraged to walk in the shoes of another, ballot initiatives that seek to terminate ways of life different from one's own shed light on agendas rather than a desire from the petitioner to effect lasting, meaningful change for everyone. A myopic focus upon the effective criminalization of hunting, fishing, and meat production and consumption ensures a situation in which all communities lose.

The hunting and harvesting of game protects natural habitats from overpopulation. The artificial insemination of livestock protects the female of some species from aggressive males. The raising and harvesting of meat provides families with an inexpensive and nutrient-dense protein source.

Criminalizing activities that are already prohibited under state law only hurts the people who are already following the law. Hunters, fishermen, farmers, and ranchers are the people who will likely be put in jeopardy by ballot initiatives like the Pause Act and IP-13 because it will be their traditions and livelihoods put at risk.

Broad ballot initiatives proposed by people who have not interacted with members of the community whose activities they wish to change, create unintended consequences from the uninitiated. These regressive ballot efforts seek to deprive all people of access to a safe, affordable source of protein, minerals, and vitamins. Activist efforts deny easy access to a balanced diet that promotes daily nutrition for children and adults and contributes to disease resistance and to the broader public health of the community.

¹⁰ Poverty rate in Washington from 2000 to 2019. Statista. Accessed Aug. 23, 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/205715/poverty-rate-in-washington/>.