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March 12, 2012

Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 94848  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4848

Dear Governor Heineman:

Last week you told 51,000 Nebraskans, “We’re going to kick your [butt] and send you {HSUS} out of the state.” As a native Nebraskan, and the mother of a four-month-old child, I am appalled that you would make such an incendiary statement and try to intimidate 51,000 tax-paying Nebraskans who support HSUS and believe in the principles of the nation’s largest animal protection organization. There is no room in our state for your brand of divisive speech – bordering on hate speech -- and I urge you to tone it down and temper it for the good of so many of us who care about animals and for the good of our state.

Asking farmers to adhere to best practices when it comes to animal welfare is neither radical nor is it an attack on agriculture. It’s right for farmers, and it’s right for consumers. An overwhelming number of Nebraskans agree. Nebraskans believe that animal welfare includes adequate exercise, space and activities, as well as food, water and shelter. Last July, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's rural poll showed that 69 percent of rural respondents believe in these basic concepts. It’s a matter of basic decency.

HSUS never came in to the state and started rattling sabers. From the first word uttered about animal welfare and agriculture, we asked to sit down with farmers and talk to them about animal welfare challenges. Though we opened the discussion by indicating we’d not conduct a ballot measure in our state, we repeated that pledge time and again, after you and a number of people with the Farm Bureau started to whip up the farming community and falsely told them that an initiative was on the horizon.

HSUS members and constituents in Nebraska – numbering about 51,000 -- are just as important to the state as every other citizen. These folks -- like my family -- are your neighbors and they are caring, compassionate people. They are veterans, farmers, small business owners, firefighters, and families with kids. We, the Nebraska members of the Humane Society of the United States, support our family farmers and ranchers. We buy and consume products every day that were produced by Nebraska ranchers and farmers. The Nebraska Farmers Union, one of the oldest farm organizations in our state, has joined with us to form the HSUS Nebraska Agriculture Council, to help preserve the family farm.

But instead of coming to the table to discuss common ground and the viewpoints of your fellow Nebraskans, you tell more than two thirds of rural Nebraskans you'd rather kick us out of the state. What's happened to civility and civic responsibility, when the chief executive of the state resorts to this sort of demagoguery?

My young daughter is not yet old enough to understand your hostile, demeaning, and recklessly untrue comments. But there are a lot of other people paying attention to your comments, and more and more of them find them unbecoming and wrong.

I urge you to get off your soapbox, and face the fact that a discussion about animal welfare in agriculture is not only appropriate, but necessary. When major corporations, like McDonald's, Burger King, and so many others, base procurement decisions on animal welfare, do you really want farmers in Nebraska to stand in place and not make adjustments related to consumer attitudes and the best available science? Not everyone welcomes discussion or changes, but that's what's occurring throughout the agriculture sector. Better to embrace it and direct it and influence it, rather than circle the wagons and attack the messenger in a ruthless and uncivil manner.

I am your neighbor. I am HSUS. I AM Nebraska.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Nickerson  
Nebraska State Director  
for the Humane Society of the United States