



Social media and those big brown eyes

WELCOME to the wonderful world of social media, where a young 4-H bull tied to a fence at London's Western Farm Fair bats his big brown eyes at a young girl, morphs into a baby cow, and in a scant 16 days, over 60 thousand people sign a petition to save his life. Yes... 60 THOUSAND...

I came across the petition while skimming email before settling in to write this column. A social media poke from a Peace River farmer suggested I visit Care2's Facebook page. Care 2 is a social activist organization with a self-described global membership base of over 37 million. Normally mostly obedient when it comes to taking direction from farmers, I did, and under the winsome picture of a young Holstein with very big brown eyes appear the following words:

For this baby cow's 2nd birthday it will be killed to become food. Please sign this petition by October 30th so the calf can live!

I clicked on the link and up popped Care2's Demand A Stop To Baby Calf Killing! page, initiated - we are told - by Ontario 4th grader Mena Murphy Qureshi.

Under the sub-heading, Target: London Ontario Western Fair Farm Grounds (sic) Mena explains on her petition site how she visited the fair on a school trip and noticed a little cow looking at her very sadly.

Mena asked someone why he was tied up, and subsequently learned that he will soon be sent to slaughter. I think this is cruel, says Mena, ...they are killing this innocent little cow for

food! ...the baby cow doesn't want to be eaten!

Hoping that a nice farmer will buy the baby cow with donations from the community, Mena wants it to "...live on the farm in peace until he dies of natural causes." She adds that would also be able to visit the baby cow and have their picture together appear in the London Free Press.

The page finishes with Mena's plea: The baby will turn two soon! Please help save this baby cow! Please sign this petition by October 30, 2016 so the baby cow can have a happy Hallowe'en!

Yesterday morning, this petition had 58,642 signatories. That's over 3,600 a day. As I file this column, 61,484 persons have signed it, an increase of 3,022 in just 24 hours. That's more than 125 new signatures every hour. Two every minute. One every 30 seconds.

SIGH... Thinking as usual that facts may be helpful, I waded in with two consecutive posts to the Care2 Facebook Save the Baby Cow petition page:

Wendy Holm: So first of all... this is almost certainly a young bull, not a "baby cow" (cows are female) nor even its younger version, a heifer.

Could be a freemartin - female twin of a male twin-mate; sterile - but much more likely this is a young bull. Probably, since he is at the fairgrounds, someone's 4-H animal. When the dairy farmer breeds a cow, roughly

half the offspring will be male (bull calves). These little bull calves - which do not give milk! - are raised for meat (often sold to the consumer as "red veal" or "baby beef"). They are not (as are calves in the beef industry) castrated (turned into steers) and sent to a feedlot where they are raised to roughly 1100 lbs. before slaughter because they are dairy calves, and dairy breeds do not have good genetics for beef production (they are, after all, bred for milk production). Raised on the farm they were born on, the little bulls are shipped at around 700 pounds. Yes slaughter is involved. Daughters (heifers) are raised for milk production. And when they are eventually culled from the herd by the dairy farmer, they too are shipped. Yes slaughter is involved. They appear at retail as hamburger. Hopefully - through good regulation and compassionate family farms where animal health is well managed - the animals we raise for food have a good life and a compassionate death. If we were not raising them for food, they would not have been born. While I appreciate the energy and compassion of the young girl who started this petition, it is important too to understand the fullness of the issue. Beyond the big brown eyes.

Wendy Holm: I am sure all Mena's classmates are aware of the petition. If I were a dairy farmer living near her school, I would offer to come in to the classroom and talk to the students about the above... Maybe visit my bull

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Demand A Stop To Baby Calf Killing!

By: [Mena Murphy Qureshi](#)

Target: London Ontario Western Fair Farm Grounds

64,436 SUPPORTERS

65,000 GOAL

I am a nine-year-old, grade four student at a public school in Ontario, Canada and I want your help to save a baby cow.

My class recently went on a field trip to the Western Fair farm grounds. While we were there, I noticed a little cow looking at me very sadly. He was tied up to a fence, and I asked someone why he was tied up.

That's how I learned that this baby cow was going to be killed... as soon as he turns two years old. I felt so bad when I learned this that I cried. They are killing this innocent little cow for food! I think this is cruel.

SIGN PETITION

FIRST NAME

LAST NAME

EMAIL

COUNTRY

Canada

STREET ADDRESS

ADD A COMMENT FOR MORE IMPACT (optional)

share with my Facebook friends

Sign Now

don't display my name

privacy policy

By signing, you accept Care2's terms of service.
Having problems signing this? Let us know.

barn to see how they all frolic around like kids when new straw is added. Help them understand why a good life and compassionate death is the goal, talk about the work of Temple Grandin, and explain the difference between conditions on big US factory farms vs. Canadian family farms. And why Canada's supply management system is so important to animal welfare.

A few hours later, I receive the ping of an incoming Care 2 FB post from 'Britta' arguing there is no "compassionate death", that no animal should be slaughtered for food, that "cultured meat" will soon appear to end all this suffering, and that hopefully in 20 years there will be only crop farmers... I look back at Mena's web petition and note for the first time that its URL contains the character string

"demand-the-end-of-animal-killing-now".

It is no surprise that some animal rights activists feel this way. What is a surprise is how quickly their views can gain traction in the world of social media. If you have any doubts about this, look back on my May 2016 WF column Why did the chicken cross the road? To escape the well-intentioned. A riddle with a warning for dairy farmers...

Cows are cuter than chickens. Caution is advised...

The only way dairy farmers can stay on top of this is by getting out in front of it. Brita makes the point in her post that in the European Union, cows in transport can only be deprived of food and water for 8 hours. In Canada, the time interval is 52 hours – almost 7 times as long... Over 2 days. There is certainly room to raise the

Canadian bar. Animal welfare is important to all of us, probably most of all family farmers. You need to own that position.

In closing the SM discussion, I made one final personal post to Mena's Care2 page:

Hi Mena! Good for you for taking action on something you believe in. As a mom, I always encourage my daughter to get active and work for change. But I always tried to make sure she is well prepared and grounded in her positions. Because of this, I refer you to 2 posts I made this morning on Care2 site concerning your petition. Working for change is always good. Hopefully my posts provide you with some further things to think about on this issue... :) Warm regards Wendy Holm

All in a morning's social media work...