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A Different Brand of Lobbying

Animal rights activist Henry Spira waged a successful two-year campaign to stop ranchers from branding diseased cattle on the face.

In a lobbying campaign that began nearly two years ago, animal rights activist Henry Spira has been badgering officials at the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to stop ranchers' traditional practice of branding diseased cattle on the face.

He's getting his way. Next month, federal rules will take effect banning the practice for all domestic cattle. Federal regulations banning the face branding of diseased *Mexican* cattle entering the United States were announced—again, thanks to Spira—earlier this year.

Some ranchers expressed opposition, arguing that removing brands from faces would make it harder to spot diseased cattle. But Spira's biggest obstacle was overcoming bureaucratic inertia.

Spira, who heads up a New York-based group called Animal Rights International, launched his campaign with a full-page *New York Times* advertisement last year. The ad displayed a graphic, four-picture sequence of a Mexican steer as a hot iron seared a brand into its face.

The pictures sparked a flood of mail and telephone calls to USDA. Though calls from the general public soon diminished, Spira kept the pressure on.

"Henry did a nice job," says Dr. John Kopec, a senior staff veterinarian on the Cattle Diseases and Surveillance staff of APHIS' Veterinary Services unit. "He made a lot of telephone calls here, and [Special Assistant to the Deputy Administrator for Veterinary Services] Dr. [Richard] Rissler was running down the hall yelling, 'Where's my face-branding regs?'"

Face branding is particularly painful because of the large number of nerve endings in the area, says Kopec. But the pictures Spira published don't tell the whole story. "They don't give you the smell," says Kopec. "It stinks."

Spira says that persistence was a key element to his success. But there was another, perhaps more important, strategy at work. "We focused on the issue, not on anybody's intent. It wasn't 'We're the good guys and you're the bad guys,' he notes. "We saw ourselves as allies" of USDA

Up next on Spira's agenda, a far more ambitious campaign: requiring meat producers to explain the circumstances under which the animal was bred. "We want to label these meats to let the consumer know what these animals went through to end up in cellophane," says Spira. "For example, 'This egg came from a bird that was never able to spread its wings.'"

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