



Kevin Fulton is a force for good for Nebraska's farm animals.

“I Am HSUS; I Am Nebraska” Farmer advocates for better conditions

When Kevin Fulton was 15 years old, a man came to his father's central Nebraska farm and asked if he could trap coyotes. Fulton's father, a veterinarian and animal lover, said no—but instead of leaving, the man set his traps a short distance away, in a ditch bordering the property. Fulton's father confronted him and told Kevin to get the trap. The boy, even at that age quite strong,

picked up a steel trap and twisted it until it buckled. He handed it back to the man in the shape of a pretzel—one trap that would never again hurt an animal.

Thirty-seven years later, Fulton is a farmer himself and still defending animals, though these days it's with his oversize personality and fearlessness rather than the bulk he developed during years of weight-

lifting competitions (he can get 730 pounds off the ground). “He is by far the biggest humane agricultural advocate in the state,” says Jocelyn Nickerson, HSUS Nebraska state director.

Long before he teamed with The HSUS, Fulton fought factory farms that wanted to move in, and in 2000 he changed his own approach to farming, switching from pesticides and chemical fertilizers to wildlife-friendly organic agriculture. “If you're going to condemn someone else for what they're doing, you better look at yourself—that's what he did,” says his mentor, farmer Jim Knopik.

While trying to end the confinement of sows in gestation crates in 2008, Fulton contacted The HSUS. A bill introduced in the state legislature with HSUS support was quickly withdrawn after a backlash from the Nebraska Farm Bureau and other allies of industrial agriculture. Instead of retreating, in the fall of 2010 Fulton invited HSUS president and CEO Wayne Pacelle to a town hall meeting in Lincoln—and to his farm, where he shared an idea: Why not form a group of farmers to advise The HSUS?

A year later, the organization reached an agreement with the Nebraska Farmers Union, which represents family farmers, to create a state agriculture council, on which both Fulton and Knopik now serve. When industry representatives say The HSUS is imposing outside values on Nebraska's farmers, Fulton replies that he is a farmer and a Nebraskan, and he's not alone—there are 51,000 HSUS supporters in the state. When Gov. Dave Heineman said earlier this year that he would “kick [HSUS's] ass” out of Nebraska, Fulton said he wasn't going anywhere. “I am HSUS; I am Nebraska,” he wrote in letters to the editor.

From Fulton's point of view, if animals are going to be raised for food, they need to be given decent lives; it is wrong to make an animal suffer unnecessarily. Fulton doesn't brand cattle, notch their ears, dock their tails, or cut off their horns. “We all die,” he says. “But at least my animals, they have only one bad day.” — *Karen E. Lange*

Kevin Fulton, Litchfield, Nebraska

► **CARING FOR THE LAND:** Fulton transformed his farm with a bold first step: planting fields in soil-enriching grass and legumes instead of corn and alfalfa. Free-ranging animals followed: cattle, sheep, and goats, plus chickens who trail behind, scratching the ground, breaking up manure piles, and eating insects.

► **WELCOME WILDLIFE:** Fulton manages his 2,800-acre plot like the prairie it once was, with livestock taking the place of bison and elk grazing fertile creek valleys between rough, grassy hills. He welcomes deer and coyotes.

► **STRIKING IT RICH:** In return for this holistic approach, his soil grows richer and more firmly rooted, rather than being depleted and washed away. And his land produces. Fulton's grass is tall, not grazed down like his neighbors, says fellow farmer Jim Knopik. And when you turn up a spade of his dirt, it's black and moist and wriggling with worms—full of life.

