



MAGGIE BRASTED

HSUS WILDLIFE ABUSE CAMPAIGN MANAGER

// BY SARAH KOWALSKI

THE LONG VIEW: “It’s a marathon, not a sprint,” says Maggie Brasted of her work advocating for change to protect wildlife. One hard-fought victory came just this year, when the Environmental Protection Agency

banned the sale of the worst rodenticides to the general public, an issue Brasted had been working on for nearly a decade. Sold under the brand name D-Con, the poisons were marketed to kill mice and rats—but also killed hawks, owls and other predators who ate the poisoned rodents, and on up the food chain. The poisons also posed serious health risks for children and pets who accidentally ingested them.

While the poisons will still be available to wildlife control professionals, Brasted says the EPA’s decision signifies major progress. “Huge societal change is very long-term,” she says.

FULL CIRCLE: The same has proven true for Brasted’s ongoing efforts to reform a government program called USDA Wildlife Services. In existence for nearly 100 years as a program of the USDA, the taxpayer-funded program (formerly called Animal Damage Control) kills millions of wild animals in the name of protecting crops, farm animals and private property. It continues to use cruel and indiscriminate killing methods like shooting from airplanes, trapping, poisoning and denning (killing young in their dens), even though nonlethal alternatives have proven effective. In 2014 alone, Wildlife Services killed more than 2.7 million wild animals, including large predators such as bears, bobcats and wolves, as well as small mammals and birds.

Brasted first became aware of the program in her previous job at an environmental consulting firm, where she worked on Wildlife Services’ environmental impact statement. She had always considered herself an environmentalist who loved animals, but the experience led her to think more deeply about how individual animals suffer as a result of human actions and human-created problems. Not long after, she began her career at The HSUS.

In the ensuing 14 years, as Brasted has worked to reform the secretive program and inform the public of its actions, she has seen some positive changes. For one, Wildlife Services sometimes recommends nonlethal solutions first to communities with animal conflicts. But she still sees much to be done. A newly released HSUS white paper calls for extensive reforms, among them an end to inhumane killing methods, an updated environmental impact statement (it hasn’t been revised since Brasted worked on it 20 years ago), a move into the Department of Interior with other wildlife programs and an end to the program’s taxpayer subsidies.

FROM THE GROUND UP: Brasted recognizes the importance of local change. “You have to follow the money,” which often comes from counties and municipalities that pay Wildlife Services to kill animals. Starting conversations with local governments and requesting that tax dollars only be spent on nonlethal wildlife control can be a powerful tool, she says, and she encourages people to find out if their county or city has a Wildlife Services contract. Changing demand could be the key to changing the way the program operates. “As long as they’re getting paid to kill animals, they’ll keep killing animals.”

+ **LEARN MORE** about Wildlife Services at humansociety.org/wildlife-disservice.

PETE ESHELMAN

HSUS INDIANA AG COUNCIL

// BY EMILY SMITH

THE ANNOUNCER’S rhythmic voice floats across the barn, painting a picture of what’s happening on a ballfield hundreds of miles away and decades ago. Then, the crack of the bat, a pause and as the crowd roars Pete Eshelman’s cows lift their heads: home run!

“My Wagyu are definitely Yankees fans,” says Eshelman, a member of the HSUS agriculture council in Indiana and owner of Joseph Decuis, one of the state’s most critically acclaimed restaurants.

Wagyu cows trace back 30,000 years to Japan, where Eshelman traveled to learn about how best to raise them. He



Eshelman

came back with tips such as warm water is best for their digestion and music can enrich their environment. When you’re a former New York Yankee, your definition of music is a little different.

Eshelman, who was drafted by the baseball team in 1976 and then worked in the front office after he was sidelined with an injury, plays tapes of Yankees radio broadcasts from the 1930s and ‘40s to the cows on his farm near Roanoke, in north-east Indiana.

“It’s a very soothing type of thing,” he says, and it’s all part of providing his animals a stress-free environment. His pigs—a Hungarian heritage breed called Mangalitsa, known for their thick hairy coat—roam and root across 5 acres of woods and pasture with natural creeks and streams. His American heritage Dixie Rainbow chickens, free of cages, strut and peck in the sunshine.

“We believe you should treat animals with respect,” Eshelman says. “We just feel good about it.”

FROM TOP: MEREDITH LEEZ/THE HSUS; KYLE MIRON