

FILM FLAM

In April 2011, bills introduced in the Minnesota House and Senate, if passed, would outlaw making any unauthorized video or audio recording inside an animal facility. The bills would also make it a crime to possess such recordings. A first offense counts as a gross misdemeanor and subsequent offenses as felonies. The bills cover such facilities as hatcheries, kennels, livestock operations, and research facilities.

According to the 8 April 2011 Star Tribune of Minneapolis, Republican State Senator Doug Magnus, who is one of the main sponsors of the Senate version of the bill, described the bill as “aimed at people who are harassing and sabotaging these operations”. He insisted, “These people who go undercover aren’t being truthful about what they’re doing.” The same paper reports Daryn McBeth, President of the Minnesota Agri-Growth Council, as saying “We think it would be an important deterrent tool in our toolbox against trespassers. You’ve had these videos shot by fraudulently hired employees, that kind of thing.”

According to the 15 May 2011 High Plains Midwest AG Journal, an investigator from the Humane Society filmed workers at a Minnesota turkey hatchery tossing sick, injured, or surplus animals into grinding machines while still alive. A spokesperson from the hatchery admitted that, while the industry accepted the practice, it “appeared to violate the company’s animal welfare policies.” Such images as these have often inflamed animal rights activists into protests, boycotts, or even violence.

Critics of the proposed Minnesota legislation fear that it will have a chilling effect on whistle-blowers trying to uncover ongoing acts of animal cruelty that would not otherwise come to light. The bill might serve as a shield for the entire agricultural industry.

Florida, Idaho, and Iowa are also considering legislation similar to the Minnesota bills.