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December 5, 2006

To the members of the San Diego City Council,

Re: Legislation to Ban the Sale of Foie Gras

I am writing you to ask you to please vote in favor of the proposed ordinance to prohibit the sale of foie gras (a “gourmet” item made from the diseased livers of force-fed ducks and geese) in the City of San Diego. Although it is considered to be a delicacy, the production of this prized item is accomplished by a process which is extremely cruel to the birds and because of the abuse involved, has been outlawed in several countries including Israel, Denmark, Poland, Norway, and Germany. In 2004, Governor Schwarzenegger signed a California bill into law which prohibits the production and sale of foie gras in California after a 7-year phase-out period. Additionally, in April 2006, the Chicago City Council voted overwhelmingly for an ordinance banning this cruel product within city limits. This ordinance went into effect in August 2006.

To introduce myself, I am a practicing veterinarian in upstate New York whose area of expertise is the investigation and prosecution of animal abuse cases. My animal hospital cares for many avian species, including domestic and wild waterfowl, since we are recognized by the state’s Department of Environmental Conservation as licensed wildlife rehabilitators. My education includes a degree from Harvard University (A.B. ’71, *summa cum laude*) and from the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University (D.V.M. ’80), from which I graduated with a class rank of #1. I have received many awards and citations for my anti-cruelty work from the New York State Troopers, The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Humane Society of the United States, and from many local animal protection organizations. I also lecture to law officers three times annually on how to implement the state’s anti-cruelty laws.

I have first-hand experience with the production of foie gras since I have inspected the primary New York State producer, located in Ferndale, NY, on 3 occasions. The first inspection was part of an undercover investigation in 1991 when the operation was under the management of Commonwealth Enterprises. I enclose the photos from this distressing investigation. The second was part of an invited inspection with representatives from Whole Foods, Inc. in 1997, in which the owners of Hudson Valley Foie Gras hoped to convince this distributor to carry their product nationwide, claiming that it was made by a humane process. The representatives were horrified by what they saw and declared they would never do business with the parent company because of the distressingly brutal treatment of the ducks that they witnessed. I enclose a copy of their letter eschewing this product and expressing their displeasure at the inaccuracy of D’Artagnan’s portrayal of their production methods.

My third inspection was in November 2005, in which I accompanied members of a New York State veterinary group by invitation from the Hudson Valley Foie Gras plant. Based upon my previous observations, it was clear to me that the operations at this facility had been altered and choreographed so as to display a more humane system and to eliminate the more cruel aspects of the production method. The producers have clearly found a way, after the spectacular failure of their Whole Foods, Inc. effort, to display their system to the dozens of visitors whom they have invited to their farms since 2004 in an effort to stave off the outlawing of their production system, as has happened in California. Instead of showing visitors the true production line, in which fifteen to twenty workers move rapidly through their 350 birds each, fed three times daily, to produce the 6,000 birds they market weekly, invited guests are now shown a very staged feeding session in which two workers move slowly through pens of birds who are all in the early stages of their 4 week feeding process, and therefore do not exhibit the pathetic ill-health (respiratory distress, epileptic seizures, inability to walk) of the birds in their final 10-14 days. If the true force feeding process were like their staged displays, Hudson Valley Foie Gras would be producing approximately 300 birds per week, not 6,000.

To create this diseased organ (hepatic lipidosis), Mulard ducks (a hybrid, non-natural breed) are forcibly restrained three times a day while a rough steel pipe is forced down their esophagi. The handler pours a fatty, corn-rich gruel down their gullets, causing extensive trauma to their esophagi in the process. After a few days of this abnormal feeding, the birds' livers become heavily infiltrated with fat and the resulting metabolic illness they suffer causes them to become too ill to walk. As their livers swell to 6 to 10 times normal size, they become weak and often can only move to escape their handlers by dragging themselves across the pens by their tattered wings. They show very clear fear of their handlers and the feeding process. Post mortem examinations of the carcasses from reveal ruptured esophagi, ruptured livers, grossly swollen and discolored livers, and a host of internal and external infections. Their feathers are tattered; their legs are lame and covered with abscesses and injuries. The force feeding process lasts for four weeks at the Hudson Valley Foie Gras plant, and these birds suffer progressively to a horrific degree before being slaughtered.

Since there are only three producers in the country (one in California and two in upstate New York), and since this is such a specialty item, a boycott of the product will not cause a failure of American agribusiness, nor will it result in depriving the public of an essential nutrient. If those who purchase and eat this product could only see the diseased organ inside the body of a filth-encrusted duck, the last place they would put this "delicacy" is in their mouths. **Please vote in favor of the proposed ordinance**, thereby insuring that the product of this brutal agricultural practice is disallowed in your city and assisting the efforts of animal protection groups nationwide who aspire to eliminate this cruel practice.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

Holly Cheever, DVM