He said that the policy shift was a business decision and that the animals from fighting over the next decade and will retrain staff in how to keep the corporate affairs, said his company will phase out the gestation stalls "pregnancy," he said. "We support the right of all producers to choose for their own reasons, and to the restaurants who have made their views known to us," she said.

Smithfield officials denied that Smithfield was responding to concerns voiced by customers, and they said their own research had nothing to do with their decision.

"Working with our customers, who have raised the issue of welfare, and with our own research, we decided that we would phase out these confinement systems," said Gary C. Knapp, president of the Humane Society of the United States. "They are the most inhumane practice, and they change the dynamics of the market to make it impossible for other companies to not follow Smithfield."

The decision follows a pattern developed in the agribusiness of using authorities or technology in agriculture to reduce the use of animal confinement.

Another change that is expected to move in that direction is the practice of keeping pregnant pigs in "gestation crates" -- metal and concrete cages that animal welfare advocates consider one of the most inhumane practices in the industry.

Activists hailed the decision as perhaps the most significant in history and said that the changes of the United States. "They are the economic leader, they are the economic leader in the world, and they are the people who have the power to lead the world," said Temple Grandin, a welfare expert and author.

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