

Events Calendar

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Akron Gamer: Oooh yeah, 'Wrestlemania' not worth a buy, brother

HBO looks at pig deaths on area farm

Documentary follows Creston investigation By Rich Heldenfels

Beacon Journal popular culture writer Published on Sunday, Mar 15, 2009 Don't bring a weak or full stomach to HBO on Monday night.

At 10 p.m., the premium channel will air 'Death on a Factory Farm,' a documentary based on an animal-rights group's investigation of a Creston pig farm in 2006 and the resulting trial.

Especially during the first half-hour, the program is loaded with images of dead, ill and mistreated pigs.

It's important to note that most of those images resulted from activities at the Wiles pig farm that were not deemed illegal. Ten counts of animal cruelty were filed against the owner and employees of the farm. By the end of the 2007 trial, only one charge, involving the throwing of piglets, resulted in a conviction.

Still, the documentary says none of the three men agreed — Wiles, his father Ken (owner of the farm) and employee Dusty Stroud — agreed to be interviewed. The lawyers do include them in court, where Ken Wiles testified, as well as their lawyers' spirited defense. And I don't blame them for not talking now.

No matter how legal the treatment of these animals is, no matter how reasonable it appears when you examine the different ways to raise and kill animals for food — in the end, the pictures still look horrible.

Still, the program that has resulted focuses on people against the Wiles farm practices.

It showcases advocates from the Humane Farming Association, which says on its Web site that its goals are "to protect farm animals from cruelty, to protect the public from the dangerous misuse of antibiotics, hormones, and other chemicals used on factory farms, and to protect the environment from the impacts of industrialized animal factories."

HFA hired an investigator called Pete in the HBO film, but also known as John Kofelt and Chris Parrett, according to the Daily Record; the documentary notes he has changed his name as part of his undercover work and for protection.

Pete went undercover at the Wiles farm in Creston, specifically to get footage of pigs being hanged; images obtained by the investigator were then used in newspaper advertisements that fired the criminal investigation.

Tom Simon and Sarah Teale, who made 'Death on a Factory Farm,' also worked with Pete for their documentary 'Dealing Dogs.'

"We followed him and shot a number of different investigations from puppy mills to issues of horse slaughter," Simon said on the HBO Web site. "But when it came down to it, we felt this [pigs] investigation was the most compelling story."

So the early part of the program follows Pete's investigation and presenting footage he obtained, including that of pigs being hanged. The latter portion highlights the prosecution and the trial. And the trial is pretty interesting because of the issues raised about what is and is not proper treatment of animals being raised for food.

And in doing so, the 88-minute program does make us look at big, nagging questions, such as where is the line that the Wiles farm was accused of crossing.

Even if you believe that the Wiles farm went too far (and I can't help but look at some of the images and think so), then what is not far enough? Is it really more humane to shoot a pig than to hang it? Would you be willing to pay several dollars more for bacon if you knew that the pigs had been brought up in the comfortable surroundings? Should we just not eat meat at all, since even the cushiest upbringing for food animals would still lead them down a path to death?

I'm not ready to give up meat. But I'd also rather not know where it comes from. And 'Death on a Factory Farm' won't let me off that easily.

Rich Heldenfels writes about popular culture for the Beacon Journal and in the HeldenFiles online blog at http://heldenfiles.ohio.com. He can be reached at 330-996-3582 and rheldenfiles@thebeaconjournal.com.

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Comments

KT2009 Akron, OH Posted 01:25 PM, 03/15/2009

Ok I have to comment. I eat meat also and it is a shame that these animals have to suffer like this. Raising pigs is how these farmers make their money correct? So they should treat the pigs humanely. Hanging and shooting??? Come on its 2009 there has to be a better way. I have worked with pigs and they are intelligent animals, people are under this misconception that they are dirty, dumb animals and they are not. Its how they are housed that makes them dirty, they don't have a choice in the matter. We need harsher punishment for cruel treatment. 250 dollars? Ok so just beat another pig to death and sell the meat then u can pay off you fine AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH. Rough stuff. Factory farming is cruel!!! Sad but true reality :(

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Buck Stops Posted 06:18 PM, 03/15/2009

Laws are like sausage. You wouldn't want to see it made.

hanged? Pigs are pretty intelligent. Shot would be much better.

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bass43player Walnut Creek, Oh Posted 10:29 PM, 03/15/2009

I was a bullhauler and hauled hogs also. Of course there is no way to 'humanely' kill an animal. But they are food. Hogs are smart? yeah, but when they don't move the hot shot sure convinces them otherwise. I toured a packing plant in Indiana one time after I went to and I couldn't ground beef, but I am still going to eat pork chops and ground beef. Pigs and cows are food. That's the way it is

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Bea Elliott Winter Haven, FL Posted 01:32 AM, 03/16/2009

Hello - to KT2009 you say it's a shame that these animals "have to" suffer like this... In truth, they don't "have to" suffer at all. We can remove the sausages from our plates and fire the henchmen.

And I agree with bass43player... there is no way to "humanely" kill an animal, especially if she's intended as "food".

And to the author of this post - you say you are not ready to eliminate meat... perhaps doing as thousands have - reduce your consumption by a few days a week at first... Each month add another day... It's an easy way to transition into a vegan or vegetarian diet. And it is pretty awful when what we consume does not align itself to our values. We can thrive on a plant based diet - consequently, all this animal killing lacks justification.

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ouch Posted 07:44 AM, 03/16/2009

i really don't care how you kill it. until it ends up on our plates it is nothing more than walking food. how do vegetarians know that the plants can't feel it when they rip their limbs off? not like can't plant can scream in pain.

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A Voice Akron, OH Posted 07:57 AM, 03/16/2009

Now there's no question that everything on a hog is used, even the squeal now, to make money.

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ouch Posted 09:16 AM, 03/16/2009

mmmm this bacon sure is good.....

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Spirit of Reagan Richfield, OH Posted 11:52 AM, 03/16/2009

Meat is murder - tasty, tasty murder.

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Spirit of Reagan Richfield, OH Posted 11:59 AM, 03/16/2009

Pulled pork is awesome.

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Burger New Franklin, OH Posted 02:42 PM, 03/16/2009

Meat is just one of the main food groups for a good reason; it contains many nutrients that our bodies need. Meat is very important to children's growth and development. It's also proven that a lack of meat and animal fats in a person's diet causes the persons brain to shrink. I raised pigs for 4H while I was in elementary school and knew what happened to them when I sold them at the fair. It's a shame that there are less and less people in the 4H program every year. It really teaches kids to respect their food and where it comes from.

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RUDY coal city, il Posted 01:26 AM, 03/17/2009

after watching three sadistic smirking pig farmers, (abusers) i sure would love to run into all of them at a restaurant or tavern, id put my foot up their uneducated asses as far as it would go, (steel tipped boots), there is at least supposed to be a small shred of decency, even for farm animals, being raised for food, but those swines ,(employee's,) and poor excuses, of a human being ,(employed the killing with glee, i' would love to bash the sons head into a pole ten or twenty times. all the while kicking him in the, but just appalling, poor excuse for a human..

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BeckyJP1977 Wadsworth, OH Posted 08:19 AM, 03/17/2009

I watched the documentary last night. They were abusing and mistreating those pigs. I understand that they are being raised for profit and food, but they still deserve to be treated decently. There may not be a humane way to euthanize an animal but thumping it and leaving it for dead in a trashcan is not humane. Hanging it by a chain is not right. They laughed and joked while killing animals, there is something seriously wrong with those people. But, down in good ol' Wayne county, you can get away with just about anything if you are a good ol' farmer boy. Those people deserved far more punishment then they got. It was a sad show to watch.

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sarah212 puyallup, wa Posted 02:20 PM, 03/17/2009

I raised pigs for two years when I was in Jr. High for 4-H and it's one of the biggest regrets that I have, 15 years later. I had no idea how smart and caring pigs were until I raised them; they are literally like dogs, but smarter. Knowing that pigs are 4th on the intelligent list after humans makes the HBO special even harder to watch. Who can be so cruel to throw a piglet like that? There are far more humane ways to raise an animal. And personally, as a meat eater, I WOULD pay more for a package of sausage where the animal had a good life and was treated humanely. We as humans are responsible for these animals, we chose to eat them as food, therefore we should raise them humanely. Anyone treating animals like the Wiles treated their hogs/piglets are cruel and in my mind highly unintelligent.

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laura788 Denver, CO Posted 02:36 PM, 03/19/2009

Ouch and Burger's comments are so typical of people--not very intelligent people that is! Animals are not walking food--and the uncaring or unconcerned comments are from abusive people who more than likely knock around their wives and kids. And if you think you NEED meat--don't complain when you have heart disease or colon cancer or one of the many diseases that are the result of a meat eating diet.

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Porcinemomma Mililani, OHI Posted 09:00 PM, 03/19/2009

First of all, I want to thank Ingrid and Pete for being so brave, and bringing this cruelty to light. Thank you to Tom and Sarah, for creating this documentary, to educate us about the horrors that go on in the factory farming business. Finally, a big thank you to HBO for airing this program. I am sure there must be of been alot of pressure from the Pork Producers to sweep this under the rug.

Mr. Heldenfels brings up a good point, in his article. It is still legal to treat an animal this way. What does that say about our society? Our violent, out of control, no regard for life, be it human or animal, society. But, I do disagree with his statement that "no matter how reasonable it appears, when you examine the different ways to raise and kill animals for food..." How can this treatment appear "reasonable"? It is barbaric, brutal, and totally unnecessary.

I think the majority of the population would pay a few more cents a pound, to know that a farmed animal was treated humanely, rather than brutalized and tortured during it's existence, with no hope of ever escaping it'sretched life.

I am not naive enough to think that everyone will stop eating meat because of this documentary. But, I would hope it will make people stop and think, were the meat on their plate, comes from and how it suffers before it gets there.

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GNAustin Oil City, LA Posted 02:36 AM, 03/20/2009

Do I feel less when a human being takes the brunt of another's anger and/or mental illness than I do when an animal suffers the same fate? I can honestly say no, not less...just different. There are very definitive laws in place to protect us from our fellow man. This is not so with animals. They are, for the most part, defenseless against a sadistic, sick human. Violent acts toward animals have long been recognized as indicators of a dangerous psychopathy that does not confine itself to animals. "Anyone who has accustomed himself to regard the life of any living creature as worthless is in danger of arriving also at the idea of worthless human lives," wrote humanitarian Dr. Albert Schweitzer. "Murderers very often start out by killing and torturing animals as kids," according to Robert K. Ressler, who developed profiles of serial killers for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Studies have now convinced sociologists, lawmakers, and the courts that acts of cruelty toward animals deserve our attention. They can be the first sign of a violent pathology that includes human victims. The FBI has found that a history of cruelty to animals is one of the traits that regularly appear in its computer records of serial rapists and murderers, and the standard diagnostic and treatment manual for psychiatric and emotional disorders lists cruelty to animals as a diagnostic criterion for conduct disorders.

A study conducted by Northeastern University and the Massachusetts SPCA found that people who abuse animals are five times more likely to commit violent crimes against humans. A majority of people I know don't feel less for humans suffering at the hands of fellow humans. They just realize that the perpetrators of such acts have the potential to become the abusers of humans and, as such, need to be treated as "more dangerous" than those already exposed, caught, and in the system.

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bekind2animals Bensenville, IL Posted 01:17 PM, 03/20/2009

Oh my God, these pigs are not just "walking food" They feel pain just like people do and are very intelligent and kind. I watched the HBO documentary Monday night. What the workers did to those poor defenseless pigs on that farm was horrible! What right do they have to treat a living creature that way? Someone needs to do the same thing back to them. For your info...we do not need to eat meat. There is only 1.5 mg of iron in meat and 11.1 mg of iron in green veggies such as broccoli, and spinach. Meat is also loaded with growth hormones & antibiotics. Plus, most of the animals are very sick when they go to be slaughtered. If people choose to eat meat, then they need to see where this meat actually comes from. Take off the blinders, then tell me you still want to eat meat? It's an ugly, brutal industry that the meat, pork and dairy producers don't want you to see! These animals are tortured, and die a painful death. There are lots of tasty meat substitutes out there...give them a try. You will feel more healthy and the animals will live a more cruelty-free life.

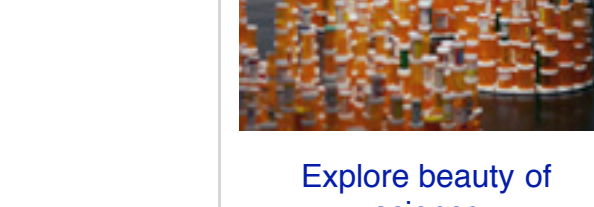
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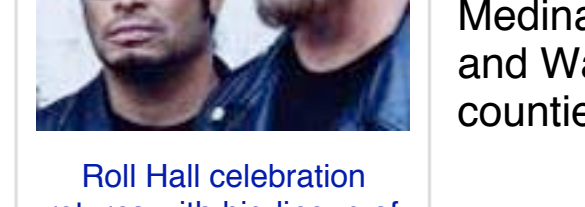
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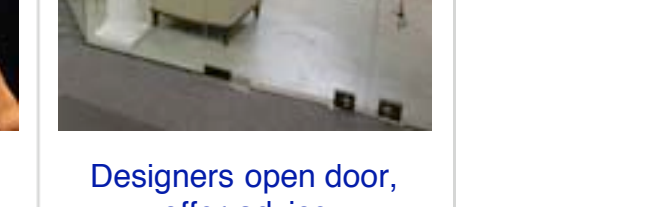


Roll Hall celebration returns with big lineup of musicians

CRIME WATCH

Published March 29 Read the weekly police blotter for Summit, Stark, Medina, Portage and Wayne counties.

HOME & GARDEN



Designers open door, offer advice