

# Tennessee Should Make All Forms of Animal Fighting a Felony In Light of Disease Outbreaks, Rampant Illegal Cockfighting

*Cockfighting Brings Threats of Spreading Avian Influenza and Driving Up Egg Prices*

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, UNITED STATES, January 23, 2023

/EINPresswire.com/ -- Citing concerns about cruelty and disease threats to other commercially raised poultry, [Animal Wellness Action](#) and the [Animal Wellness Foundation](#) today called on Tennessee lawmakers to give favorable consideration to SB 194, by Senator Jon Lundberg, R-Bristol, and H.B. 285, by Rep. Sam Whitson, R-Franklin, to make core cockfighting activities a federal offense.



Illegal cockfighting in Tennessee is cruel to the birds and risks spreading avian flu and other diseases.

Under Tennessee law, cockfighting is a Class A misdemeanor. Tennessee is one of eight states without felony-level penalties for a first offense related to cockfighting.

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*Wayne Pacelle, president,  
Animal Wellness Action*

“Cockfighting is not only illegal and barbaric, but it is associated with gambling, narcotics trafficking, and other crimes,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the [Center for a Humane Economy](#). “It also poses a threat to commercial poultry production, with widespread movement of potentially infected cockfighting roosters adding fire to the current avian influenza outbreak and putting the price of eggs out of reach for thousands of Tennesseans.”

In 2020, Animal Wellness Action and Animal Wellness Foundation announced that an investigation uncovered

extensive involvement in cockfighting from a large number of individuals in Tennessee, including several who ship cockfighting birds to Mexico, the Philippines, Guam, and other distant locations. The groups allege that these individuals are also involved in fights at illegal pits in Tennessee, Kentucky, and other states.

“Cockfighting drives outbreaks of serious poultry and zoonotic diseases especially virulent Newcastle disease (vND) and highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses,” said Jim Keen, D.V.M, Ph.D., who formerly worked at USDA’s National Meat Animal Research Center. He added that HPAI (“bird flu”) and vND are the two most high-impact diseases of poultry worldwide.

According to a new report from the Center for a Humane Economy, the 15 known introductions of vND into the United States since the first outbreak in 1950 have led to three devastating epidemics in 1971, 2002, and 2018. Disease introductions occurred from legally imported pet birds (often parrots), imported infected poultry, or game fowl smuggled for cockfighting. Ten of the 15 US vND outbreaks originated from illegally smuggled game fowl for cockfighting.

The current outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza has resulted in the mass killing of 60 million birds, mainly laying hens. That extraordinary loss of life has driven a surge in egg prices, with a dozen eggs priced between \$4 and \$7.50 in Tennessee and other parts of the United States. Cockfighting birds, according to Dr. Keen, can play a role in extending the range, duration, and virulence of the outbreak.

“Cockfighting breeds a cesspool of other illegal activities, such as gambling and drug abuse,” said Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action and a former resident of Tennessee. “It is time to root out this behavior with a combination of precise lawmaking and robust enforcement.”

## WHAT TO DO

The groups also announced a \$5,000 reward for information resulting in successful prosecution of any individual for violating the federal law (7 U.S.C. § 2156) or the state law (TCA Title 39) against animal fighting.

Anyone with information about illegal cockfighting activities can send information to [animalcrueltytips@animalwellnessaction.org](mailto:animalcrueltytips@animalwellnessaction.org). Residents also can contact the appropriate U.S. attorneys, the state attorney general, or county sheriffs or district attorneys.

## ABOUT

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) whose mission is to help animals by promoting laws and regulations at federal, state and local levels that forbid cruelty. The group champions causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife, and it advocates against dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty. It

also confronts factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, Animal Wellness Action promotes enacting good public policies and monitors the enforcement of those in place. To enact good laws, the group believes citizens must elect good lawmakers, and it helps educate voters on which candidates care about animal issues as well as those who are hostile to them. Animal Wellness Action believes helping animals helps us all.

Center for a Humane Economy is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(3) whose mission is to help animals by helping forge a more humane economic order. The first organization of its kind in the animal protection movement, the Center encourages businesses to honor their social responsibilities in a culture where consumers, investors, and other key stakeholders abhor cruelty and the degradation of the environment and embrace innovation as a means of eliminating both. The Center believes helping animals helps us all.

Animal Wellness Foundation is a Los Angeles-based private charitable organization whose mission is to help animals by making veterinary care available to everyone with a pet, regardless of economic ability. The group organizes rescue efforts and medical services for dogs and cats in need and help homeless pets find a loving caregiver. The Foundation advocates for getting veterinarians to the front lines of the animal welfare movement; promoting responsible pet ownership; and vaccinating animals against infectious diseases such as distemper. They also support policies that prevent animal cruelty and alleviate suffering. The Animal Wellness Foundation believes helping animals helps us all.

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