

April 2, 2001

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Hoping for Disease  
 PETA Hopes Foot-and-Mouth Strikes in the United States

By *Alan Elsner*  


N O R F O L K, Va., April 2 — While U.S. authorities take precautions to prevent foot-and-mouth from entering the country, the president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, possibly the world's most influential animal rights organization, openly hopes the disease crosses the Atlantic.

"If that hideousness came here, it wouldn't be any more hideous for the animals — they are all bound for a ghastly death anyway. But it would wake up consumers," said PETA co-founder and president Ingrid Newkirk.

Interviewed on Friday in the office she shares with four cats, Newkirk said: "I openly hope that it comes here. It will bring economic harm only for those who profit from giving people heart attacks and giving animals a concentration camp-like existence. It would be good for animals, good for human health and good for the environment."

Border officials, zoos and theme parks have been taking precautions to prevent the disease, which is raging in Britain and has spread to several other European countries, from entering the United States, which has not seen an outbreak since 1929. Last week, pigs suspected of carrying the disease on a North Carolina hog farm tested negative.

Vegetarian Starter Kits

Meanwhile PETA workers report vastly increased demand for its "vegetarian starter kits" from worried meat eaters. That number would no doubt rocket higher if either foot-and-mouth or "Mad Cow" disease reached American shores.

Since its founding in 1980, PETA has emerged as a powerful force, campaigning on the principle that animals should not be eaten, worn, experimented on or used for entertainment.

The organization, founded in Newkirk's basement in a suburb of Washington, D.C., now occupies several stories of a headquarters in Norfolk, Va. It employs 130 people, has 700,000 members, revenues of \$17 million and has opened small branch offices in Britain, Germany, Italy and India.

The PETA building looks and feels much like any corporate headquarters except for the dozens of dogs wandering around and sitting on special mattresses.

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Employees are encouraged to bring their pets to work. Many also take part in civil disobedience campaigns and boast long arrest records.

#### Nothing Like a Naked Woman in a Cage

For example, Kristie Phelps, who runs a campaign against circus animals, occasionally strips naked, paints her body with tiger stripes, and crouches in a cage outside the Big Top for an hour to dramatize the plight of caged circus beasts.

"Nothing promotes discussion and dialogue better than a naked woman in a cage. It gives me perspective on the lifetime of suffering these animals endure," she said.

PETA can call on a cadre of film stars, entertainers and supermodels to publicize its campaigns. Businesses, from McDonald's to L'Oreal and Gillette to General Motors to Calvin Klein — all of which have altered some of their practices in response to PETA campaigns — have learned not to take the organization lightly.

Avon, Revlon, Estee Lauder and L'Oreal ended animal testing to develop cosmetics as did Gillette; Calvin Klein stopped producing fur for its clothes; General Motors ended crash tests on animals while The Gap stopped using leather from animals in India and China.

#### War on the Whopper

PETA's latest target is Burger King, with its 11,330 restaurants in 58 countries selling 2.6 billion hamburgers a year. PETA wants Burger King to fall into line with McDonald's, which last year, after an 11-month campaign, agreed to unannounced inspections of its slaughterhouses. It said it would halt the practice of starving chickens to encourage egg production, increase the space given to battery hens and stop slicing off hens' beaks.

Last week, a dozen PETA supporters showed up outside a Burger King in Washington, set up a video screen on the sidewalk showing horrific slaughterhouse scenes and started handing out leaflets to passersby.

One protester, Sarah Clifton, walked into the restaurant and joined the line. When she reached the front, she sprang onto the counter and began shouting: "This restaurant is shut down for cruelty to animals. Everyone please leave." A police officer wrestled her to the ground but she continued shouting for another 20 minutes until two more officers arrived to drag her away.

No sooner was she out the door when Nick Potch jumped up and started yelling anti-meat slogans. He too was manhandled away but by the time the demonstration was done, it had tied up business for about half an hour and required six police squad cars to be summoned.

Both protesters were charged with unlawful entry and released several hours later. They face April 12 court appearances. Such cases are often dismissed or end with fines, which the protesters pay out of their own pockets.

Burger King spokeswoman Kim Miller said the chain had seen around 30 such demonstrations in the past month but no direct impact on sales. She said Burger King took issues of safety and animal welfare very seriously and was forming an advisory council on animal well-being.

#### Slowing the March of Dimes

[Foot-and-Mouth False Alarm](#)

[Foot and Mouth Concern Spreading to U.S.](#)

[Zoo Animals at Risk of Foot-and-Mouth](#)

[British Minister Says Foot-and-Mouth Outbreak Came From Pig Swill](#)

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Newkirk said PETA chose its targets carefully and never backed away from a campaign once it was launched. "Our opponents know we never let up. They have to concede to some degree. They have to alleviate some of the misery they are causing before we back down," she said.

The organization has its enemies. It has been accused of extremism in some of its methods and in arguing that all animal experimentation is morally wrong and could be replaced by human epidemiological studies and other techniques.

Right now, PETA is targeting the March of Dimes charity which gives a small percentage of its resources to organizations that do animal experimentation. Already, several corporate contributors to the March of Dimes have earmarked their contributions for non-animal uses.■

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