

Honorable members of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors, I am Tom Pool, and I am the senior veterinarian for Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy. I grew up on a beefcattle and dairy cattle ranch in southwest Oklahoma and eventually left there to pursue my training in agriculture and then veterinary medicine at Oklahoma State University. I spent 26 years in the U.S. Army, eventually serving as Commander of the U.S. Army Veterinary Command, overseeing a worldwide, tri-service force with 2,500 military personnel. For the last 11 of those years I was the dairy science consultant to our Surgeon General. Tulare County is the number one dairy county in the United States, and I still do dairy consulting for a half dozen dairies in California. Your part of the world is very important to me.

It is unlikely that you have considered the linkage between cockfighting and the dairy industry, but that linkage is important. One of the greatest challenges to the beef and dairy industries (and I would remind you that the dairy industry also has an important beef component) is the wholly inaccurate opinion by some that those industries are fundamentally cruel. I grew up on a small beef/dairy ranch, and my family is still in the beef business. I have devoted my life to protecting animals from suffering, and you can visit our ranch and see that while we raise animals for production, we meet every possible need they have. Our goal is to assure that the animals under our care have just one bad day, and that all of the preceding days are filled with comfort and the satisfying of their core needs. The idea of staging fights between animals for amusement and not for consumption is antithetical to our animal care values. If you believe in agriculture, as I know you do, then cockfighting should elicit the same revulsion that I feel for staged animals combat.

The greatest threat to animal agriculture is the notion that those of us in agriculture do not care about the animals under our charge. We are animal experts, and when we have a chance to speak out against real animal cruelty, we should do so. I urge you to support this ordinance as a complement to the valuable state and federal laws on the books to combat cockfighting. These cockfighting operations in Tulare exist to fight animals in your county and to ship them to other jurisdictions to die in fighting pits.

I spent the last 17 years as the Territorial Veterinarian for Guam where cockfighting is not banned under territorial law. But cockfighting is now banned there under federal law, and it's been a federal crime to ship fighting birds to Guam since 2002. Sadly, that law has not been enforced. Guam imported 12,500 fighting birds from the mainland USA during the five years before the recent avian influenza outbreak shut down imports, and California was the second largest exporter of fighting roosters. The ban on private ownership on large numbers of roosters will turn out to be the most effective and efficient deterrent to cockfighting and help us all crack down on this barbaric practice.

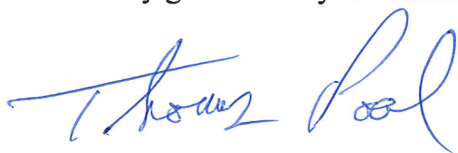
If you could witness the appalling cruelty those poor birds are subjected to, you would understand better the people involved in this enterprise and their utter lack of concern for animal welfare and their involvement in organized criminal conduct. In so many cases I've seen that they are intimately tied to illegal gambling, drugs, firearm sales, on and on. Yet they noisily cloak

themselves as just another branch of noble animal agriculture. That is a pretense and any rational person can see right through this charade.

There are dozens of other important reasons why cockfighting is dangerous for Tulare County. Cruelty to animals. Drug trafficking. Money laundering. Illegal Gambling. The spread of zoonotic diseases. And so many other reasons.

So many other counties have taken action, and are planning to take action, against illegal cockfighting. If Tulare doesn't act, it will become a magnet for this sort of criminal conduct. I urge you to take action and replicate Ventura County's excellent ordinance. I stand ready to serve in any way I can to help you advance an important new reform, protecting animals, serving and defending agriculture, and making Tulare County a better place to live.

I am very grateful for your attention to this important issue.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas Pool". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Thomas" and the last name "Pool" clearly legible.

Thomas Pool, DVM, MPH,

Dipl. American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine

Colonel, US Army (ret.)