



## BIG QUESTION ONE

BROOKS CONGRESS 2020 TRANSCRIPT

**WHAT IS THE BIGGEST  
CHALLENGE OR OPPORTUNITY  
FOR THE ANIMAL PROTECTION  
MOVEMENT?**

**VOICEOVER:**

In February 2020, the Brooks Institute hosted approximately 80 of the most influential actors in the animal protection community to discuss the current state of the animal protection movement. Some of these Congress Delegates volunteered to respond to big questions. Here are the responses to the question, "What is the biggest challenge or opportunity for the animal protection movement?"

**CAMILLE LABCHUK (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR at ANIMAL JUSTICE):**

To have law and policy, you need laws on the books. One serious problem facing animals right now is that industries that use them tend to self-regulate. So the farming industry largely makes up its own rules and doesn't always have regulations and public oversight from the government. This runs very deep, so even the enforcement of animal cruelty laws is largely done in many jurisdictions by SPCAs or humane societies, which are private charities themselves, and rely largely on private donations to do their work.

The idea that animal protection is a matter that should be taken care of privately by individuals who care, or individuals who use animals, instead of a matter for public concern and government oversight, I think is a serious challenge, and I believe that there's room to start to see that paradigm being chipped away at. Moving law enforcement into the public sphere and introducing strong regulations to govern these industries instead of letting them make up their own rules.

**ANGELA FERNANDEZ (PROFESSOR OF LAW at UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO):**

Well, I think, in a way, the largest obstacles are sort of the biggest opportunities, and that's another way of looking at it. But certainly, one of the big obstacles is the lack of societal acceptance of animals being seen as worthy of protection. That is a big problem. Until you get that, it's very hard for the law to pick up, or know where to go, or which direction to move in. I think that's very, very important to get that societal consensus or some sense of consensus, and then the law can lead once you get that. But the fact that animals don't have political representation of their interests is an issue that is also very, very important.

I think groups like animal justice, they're really helping to pave the way for that kind of an understanding for animals. Then you can get your society, your politics, and your law all on the same page. That's the sense in which, I think, animal protection is moving. As Camille mentioned, we're here this weekend to canvas off different ideas coming from players in all different service sectors as to how do we get there.

**SEAN BUTLER (FELLOW, ST. EDMUND'S COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE):**

The biggest challenge in animal protection is a traditional long-standing perception of how we think of animals. We think of them as things we own, things we eat, things we kill. We think about them as property. We've had anti-cruelty laws and animal cruelty laws for two hundred years. Martin's Act, it was passed in the UK in 1822, so we're nearly coming out for the two hundredth anniversary. That law started saying that being cruel to animals was just not right.

It's the wrong thing to do and there was a lot of public acceptance for that. But that's only two hundred years. Although, I don't think people want to be cruel; I don't think we want to be harsh to animals, we don't have the same connection with animals. The idea of a sausage, or a burger, or a steak, it doesn't really connect us with the idea of killing a living animal. So, I think the biggest single change will be getting a sense of responsibility towards sentient animals.

The second problem is going to be the paradigm shifts that can be produced through animal rights law because animal rights will have huge implications for farm animals. There will be very few farmed animals. It'll have huge implications for laboratory testing. There won't be any. Wild animals will have rights, which is going to have implications for things like national parks and those sorts of things.

So, I think the biggest challenge is going to be the idea that our paradigm about our relationship with animals is going to have to be different. As I said, I think people are thoughtful. I don't think people want to be cruel or unkind, and as an alternate paradigm, it's a perfectly good one. There's nothing wrong with it. There's nothing intrinsic that we say we have to do these things. I think the biggest challenge is going to be that. On the other hand, I think the benefits will be seen, not just in terms of welfare and the way we treat animals, I think animal rights are going to have implications for things like cruelty and violence.

Because in many ways, the way we treat animals, certainly slaughter is almost the last outpost of recognized and approved violence, and that's going to change. Then at an even higher level, it's about respect for sentients. Respect for things that are alive because they're alive and because we should be excited, and thrilled, and take pleasure, rather than seeing them as objects and things to be eaten, swept away, or dealt with. I think it'll feed back into our humanity. I think the implications are really quite and I'm looking forward to it. I do tell my students we could be talking thirty to sixty years, so it'll take a while.

**MANEESHA DECKHA (PROFESSOR & LANSDOWNE CHAIR IN LAW at UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA):**

After eighteen years of researching, teaching, and really thinking deeply about these issues, I strongly believe that an untapped opportunity for the movement exists in reaching out to human children in their early childhood years before they get a chance to formulate, let alone entrench, their views about who animals are, what they deserve, and how humans should treat them.

I think that if the movement can amplify and really make it's humane educational efforts pervasive, by bringing an animal rights message, a nuanced message and age appropriate message, into schools, libraries, books, apps, film, and everything that kids are exposed to today, that we have a chance of taking what are already for many children, natural affinity towards animals and instead of them losing that as they age, and being ashamed about their emotions or compassion, transforming that into something valued and respected. Thus transforming the majoritarian values, perhaps even in one generation.

I think a part of that is to make sure that we cultivate empathy in kids, and that's not a kind of a singular type of track project. Children have to be well-supported in their own upbringing before they can develop the capacity of empathy. We have to be really, really vigilant looking at gaps in upbringing for our kids so that they can then be empathetic towards animals.

**MIA MACDONALD (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR and FOUNDER at BRIGHTER GREEN; CO-VICE PRESIDENT at CULTURE & ANIMALS FOUNDATION):**

Even if information isn't the only thing that persuades people, I do think the facts are on our side. When we look at the scale and consequences of animal exploitation on the environment but also our own human communities, I think there's very little way to support that there's a net benefit of that kind of exploitation of animals. I think it's going to build on a lot of the extraordinary work that has been done in the last forty, fifty, even a hundred years to anti-vivisection movements that were in the UK and other places.

Even a thousand years ago, emperors in India were having edicts on the kind of treatment of animals. So, I think it's probably going to take certainly information, more linkages, and more strategic work across organizations and movements. I think with the environmental movement and the climate change movement, there are many people and organizations that are really concerned about the bio-diversity loss as well. I think we can find more linkages with those movements, especially around animal agriculture and exploitation of wildlife. I also think there's probably a need for more capacity development in varied ways.

We see the animal movement becoming more professional in terms of research, writing, and in terms of analysis, and I think that's great. I do still think there's a strong value in organizing and movement building. I also see the US and European animal protection movement having strong links and things to learn from movements in other parts of the world. For example, there are people that care about animals in Kenya and that might seem obvious but to some people animal welfare is just a Western country thing. There are people who care about animals in China. There are people who care about climate change all throughout the world.

So I think that the animal protection movement has potential to be even more powerful and impactful in certain circumstances when linking with other movements. As well as, helping organize grassroots power and power in policy contexts in the UN Climate Change Convention, which is the main global policy making body for climate change. There's really no constituency there advocating for animals, even though trillions of animals live on the planet. So we've been doing a lot of work around animal agriculture, which I think is very important and obviously, a strong case there, but it's still kind of an instrumental view of "don't use animals for food."

It's not the same as saying, look, animals are suffering the consequences of climate change. We are responsible. The majority is human responsibility and human activities. How do we advocate for those animals? What are some of the policy measures? Is it interventions to provide water in drought situations for wildlife, not just domesticated animals? Is it planning? Is it changing how we deal with cities? Right now, apart from some indigenous groups with a little bit of environmental interest, there really aren't people talking about animals as animals. I think there's a real potential for growth there.

The other reason I would say the potential is there there's a generational shift that younger people, 30 and younger, wherever I encounter them, in China, in Paraguay, in New York, in Europe, there is more interest among issues among many of them, not all of them of course. But majority of them are environmentalists; they care about climate; they care about animals; they care about power between North and South; they care about the power of corporations; they care about social movements and I think there's real potential there. Not that it's easy. Not that there

won't be backlash. Those of us who have been doing this work for many years know that. The course of change is not a straight line but I think there's huge potential.

**LEAH GARCES (PRESIDENT at MERCY FOR ANIMALS):**

Currently, the issue is protecting farmed animals and reconstructing our food system. We must treat it like an emergency because it's affecting more individual animals than any other issue. Additionally, it's not just affecting farmed animals, it's affecting the survival of our planet, many other species, and ourselves. We need to treat it with urgency. Yet, the attention at the political, corporate, and at the philanthropic level, it's not reflective of that, and that has to change. We have to think about how do we change that?

I think the key to changing that is not thinking about it in silos or from only an animal ethics perspective. We have to bring in all the arguments that factory farming negatively impacts communities, our health, the environment, the survival of our planet and all its species. We must bring in all these elements and not just take a narrow approach down. We have to take over all the roads to get there.

**MARTIN ROWE (PRESIDENT at LANTERN PUBLISHING & MEDIA; CO-VICE PRESIDENT at CULTURE & ANIMALS FOUNDATION):**

Well, I think the biggest challenge that we face in terms of animal protection is recognizing that we can no longer afford to be a movement based on moral awakening for personal change. We are a movement that can no longer be in opposition to cruelty on an individual level. We need an analysis of a systemic change, which will be forced on us whether we want to or not. So, what I would like to see animal rights and veganism do as a whole is declare victory and say this is the future that we imagine. I want us to be the people who say this is our vision of how we live in relationship to wild animals, formerly domesticated animals, and the ecosystem as a whole.

This is where we see farmers, ranchers, and fishermen as restorers of ecosystems, protectors of watersheds, bio-scientists, stewards of habitat, valuable members of the community in the future, as they allow the rewilding, the carbon sequestration, the carbon farming, the wind farming, the solar farming, the water farming, and the bio-diversity farming, as a way of protecting this planet against the ravages of the climate crisis.

I would like to see veganism being not about deprivation, but providing the resources to magnify the number of food sources that we have by 10,000 fold. We are not about depriving people of their five different kinds of meat that they eat but we are the creators of a variety of pleasures and, most significantly survival, because of the research that we've done into the manifold varieties of peas, beans, and all sorts of other kinds of grains. All of that depends on diversity - diversity of approaches, diversity of stories, diversity of ecosystems, diversity of cultures, and diversity of people's orientations. Because what is killing us now is mono-culturation - fields and fields of soy, corn, and wheat destroying the bio-diverse rain forests.

Plantations of trees, as far as the eye can see, is destroying bio-diversity that is contained in old growth forests and natural woodland. We also need diversity of our mono-cultural political view point, a mono-culture of the nation state and ethnic identity, and a digging down on "it's our way or no way", whatever that particular project may be.

Otherwise, we are all going to perish. None of that is a protective mechanism. And how do we know that? Because nature tells us that. Nature needs diversity. If one ecosystem collapses, another ecosystem takes on that life, and so that, for me, is the heart. It is about how do we get more diversity in every single way in order to allow some of us, at least, to survive?

**CYNTHIA BATHURST (CO-FOUNDER and CEO at SAFE HUMANE CHICAGO):**

In safe humane, one of the things that I'm really proud of is being founded on bringing together dogs that have been abused with people who have been impacted by violence and trauma. By bringing them together to help each other, we learn a lot about language and ideas.

The Court Case Dog program is one of a kind program in the country. We've done it for ten years and I think it needs to be a model in that it looks at dogs that have been abused by owners and have a criminal court case associated with them, not just evidence, and they are part of a whole court system and a community value, I would say. We need to take that program, help those dogs, bring them together with those communities. I think we have a lot to learn from that.

**CAMILLA FOX (FOUNDER and EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR at PROJECT COYOTE):**

I think the animal protection movement needs to look at how we can bridge with other movements, how to ensure that we're not working in a silo, and how we appeal to people's compassion because I think ultimately, we are born with a deep sense of compassion and connection to other beings. I think that slowly gets eroded and that's why I think it's absolutely critical that we reach young people in all the different ways that we can, through social media, through documentaries, etc. There are a multitude of ways that we can reach people. That's really why I think that film is absolutely critical. Reaching young people is multi-faceted but we really need to look at how we can accomplish that.

(The video was concluded.)