

## 'Contagion' Movie Makes the Case for Modern Livestock Farming

Written by Laurie Johns

Monday, 19 September 2011 09:06

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I saw the movie, "Contagion," this weekend with my daughter. I have to say, it's a good flick, good actors, fast-paced and slickly shot. Without realizing it, the film makers may have inadvertently endorsed America's modern hog farms. For one thing, raising hogs indoors protects them from disease-carrying wildlife, the very kind that caused the cross-species viral contamination featured in the movie.

(Spoiler alert!)

In "Contagion", Gwyneth Paltrow ('Patient Zero') inadvertently acquires a deadly (spreads by touch) viral infection in Hong Kong by shaking the unwashed hands of a chef (note to all movie-goers: always wash hands before eating). She didn't realize this chef had just prepared a dish from a hog that was exposed to a sick bat. This pig was apparently raised in an open-air pen, where a sick bat flew overhead, then dropped a piece of fruit it just grabbed from a banana tree. Pigs, true to nature, eat anything. And so the story goes...

But, what I find interesting is that the Humane Society of United States' Wayne Pacelle is claiming "Contagion" actually makes a case for raising animals in the very conditions that put them at risk for contracting contagions from other species ( <http://hsus.typepad.com/> ). I'm wondering if he saw the same movie.

I grew up on a Century farm in Iowa and have many fond memories. But, after seeing "Contagion," I think Hollywood's screenwriters could use a little 'chore time' on an actual, working farm to gain some perspective.

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I saw birds, wild cats, stray dogs, raccoons and mice scrambling through our hog feedlot and roaming in the moonlight across our cattle pastures. I remember the year wild dogs got our rooster (so much for my dad's egg-laying chicken farm idea), the year rabid skunks got into the hog lot (28 shots in the stomach for us, but the hogs were vaccinated, of course), and the daily roaming of a horde of much-loved, but unvaccinated feral cats.

Things were different back then. Today, it's not just rabies vaccinations (three shots!) that have improved, so has hog farming ( <http://link.brightcove.com/services/player/bcpid64340018001?bckey=AQ~~,AAAACMzGNIE~,zfiweksx8NKGXiTGxVmXug1yWfMOUJx&amp;bclid=69776058001&amp;bctid=918490352001> ). Farmers who choose to raise their hogs in modern livestock barns say doing so protects them from exposure to wildlife, harsh weather and viruses that can be carried by any stranger who happens to wander onto the farm.

It's a choice. Responsible farmers across Iowa work hard to give them to you. There are many options for raising animals, both indoors and out. But clearly, progress in American agriculture (versus overseas?) keeps our animals safer, our food safer and our families safer from the kind of Hollywood hysteria portrayed in "Contagion," and the kind of 'one size fits all' food production model Pacelle and the HSUS hype machine condones.

--- Laurie Johns