New laws and bans put animals first

(CPS) -- The animal rights movement -- and its success in pushing laws and bans going into effect this fall -- is driving up the costs of campus research by convincing more public animal shelters to stop supplying stray to labs, various researchers say.

“We are not at the critical stage yet, but we will be in the very near future,” says Susan Wilson, acting director of the division of Animal Resources for the University of Arizona’s med school.

“Animals will now cost us five to 10 times more,” she says.

At Harvard, “a lot of investigators have had to rearrange their budgets and apply for additional funds,” reports Dr. Ronald Hunt, the school’s director of animal resources.

Wilson estimates the local pound’s refusal to give more animals to Arizona could amount to “a loss of $200,000 to $600,000, not including lost research grants.”

But while some scientists say the movement’s impact -- which spread quickly through U.S. campuses after the 1982 conviction of a University of Maryland professor for cruelty to animals -- is economically crippling, others minimize the cost increases and say many schools are adopting new research technologies to replace animals.

Eleven states in all have outlawed “pound seizures” of animals during the last four years.

The Humane Society of the U.S., for one, doubts the pounds’ action will inhibit research or make it more expensive.

“These (anti-pound seizure) measures have stopped the flow of cheap animals,” concedes Dr. Randall Lockwood of the society.

But they have helped preserve animals, too.

“It is parallel to the ban on the importation of rhesus monkeys. They were treated like disposable commodities to pick up, use and throw out. When they became expensive, they were ultimately treated like valuable items.”

Harvard’s Hunt doesn’t see the laws helping to save animal lives, however.

“We are talking about animals that are going to be destroyed (anyway),” he says.

And while Lockwood says dogs bred for research are better anyway because scientists know the animals’ genetic histories, Hunt thinks “it is somewhat ridiculous to breed a dog for (research and then destruction) when hundreds of thousands are available.”

“It’s a ridiculous situation,” says UT-Memphis Chancellor Dr. James Hunt.

“People prefer to kill (unwanted) animals (in pounds) rather than allow animals to be used to enhance mankind. They are putting animal values ahead of human values.”

University of Chicago spokesman Jonathan Kleinbarg last spring testified that a proposed Chicago law to control the flow of animals into labs would stop “most to the medical research that takes place in this city (on) heart disease, AIDS, diabetes, accident injuries, etc.”

And in July, 1985 a group of multiple sclerosis suffers, organized as The Incurable Ill for Animal Research, organized to protest local Arizona shelters’ then-proposed plans to stop selling strays to UA labs.

Now, the UA’s Wilson says there’s no overestimating the impact.

“This will affect our teaching program,” she says, “the accreditation at the medical school and, ultimately, the quality of life in Arizona.”

Others think the changes will force the very scientists to do research.

“New technologies, computers and video, I’ve seen these types of things develop, but we still use animals,” says Harvard’s Hunt.