

ANIMAL WELFARE, ETHICS & THE U.S. DAIRY INDUSTRY: MAINTAINING A SOCIAL LICENSE TO OPERATE

**The Ohio State University
Cronney.1@osu.edu*



Advantages of dairy production

- Compared to other animal industries, dairy cattle welfare appears less problematic
- Positive imagery associated with dairy cows
 - "Great cheese comes from happy cows. Happy cows come from"
 - The dairy cow as "foster mother of the human race"
- Relatively little negativity in public perceptions and responses



Why should the dairy industry be concerned about welfare?

- Welfare is not a “top of mind issue”, but....
- Easily becomes a focal issue when attention is drawn
- Existence of welfare issues
 - Lameness
 - Mastitis
 - Painful practices
 - Handling
- Consumers use animal welfare to indicate other attributes, e.g., safety & health (Harper & Makatouni, 2002)





US Animal welfare legislation

- 2002: FL bans gestation crates for sows
- 2006: AZ bans crates for veal calves & gestating sows
- 2007: OR bans gestation crates for sows (via state legislature)
- 2007: AVA votes to group house calves by 2017
- 2008: CO bans gestation crates & veal calf crates (compromise bill)
- 2008: CA Prop 2; "animals must be able to turn around and fully stretch their limbs/wings"
- 2009: ME bans gestation crates and veal calf crates
- 2009: MI Prop 2-like wording (compromise bill)
- 2009: OH Issue 2; Livestock Care Standards Board
- 2010: CA bans tail docking

How did it come to this? “Perfect storm” culminates in US animal welfare legislation

(basically, a repeat of UK reform history ca. 1964-65)

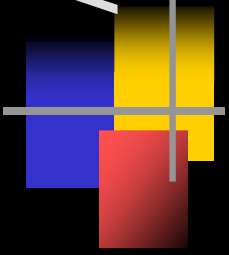


Societal changes

- Growing disconnect with production agriculture
- Contact with animals primarily through pets, zoos or mass media
- Extension of moral consideration to categories of humans previously denied
 - Natural progression to extend to animals



Cherney, 2006



Animal rights vs. welfare

- Animal Rights
 - The idea that animals have certain characteristics (e.g., sentience, inherent value) and thus, have rights
 - Non-interference (Regan, 2003)?
 - Allowance of telos (Rollin, 1993)?
 - Avoidance of suffering?
 - (Singer, 2002: not an animal rights supporter)
- Animal welfare
 - Animal use is acceptable, but people have obligations to treat animals “humanely”

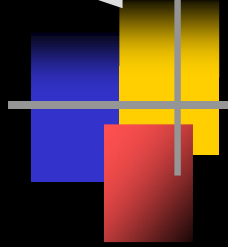
Anthropomorphism & the human-animal bond





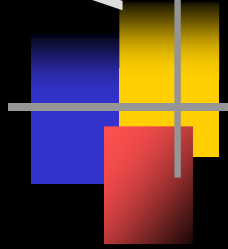
Human-animal interactions and welfare

- Relationships with pets ⇨ paradigm for other animals
- ⇨ questions and concerns about farm animal care & animal welfare
 - ⇨ many practices challenged on ethical grounds
 - Lack of response to ethical concerns ⇨ interest in regulating farm animal production practices



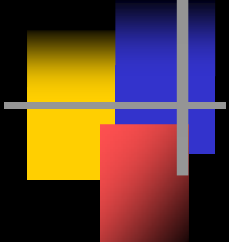
Animal care vs. animal welfare

- Welfare (ethics) challenges frustrate scientists & producers
 - More comfortable with science; most provide good care
- “Care” translates to meeting **minimum** husbandry standards
 - **The public assumes we do this**
- The question is not *do we* provide care for animals, but *do we care about* what our animals experience?
 - E.g., their quality of life (and death)



Animal welfare: science & values

- Animal welfare relates to “quality of life”
 - What is good quality of life for a dairy cow?
- “Good welfare = good husbandry”
 - Meeting minimum care standards
- *Welfare: how well an animal is coping
 - Biological function
 - Mental function (behavior, feelings)
- Definition chosen reflects values

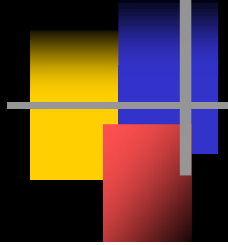


**BUT POLICIES MUST BE
BASED ON SCIENCE!**

Constraints of science



- Animal welfare is *not* just about science
- What science can do (Swanson & Mench, 2000)
 - What are the effects of system X on animals?
- What science cannot do (Swanson & Mench, 2000)
 - How *should* we be treating animals?
 - What is acceptable quality life for animals?
 - What is not ok to do to the cow?
 - (When nothing is unacceptable, it becomes clear that there is no ethical framework)
- Need *both* science & values



THE ROLE OF PERCEPTIONS & CHANGING SOCIAL ETHICS IN DRIVING US ANIMAL WELFARE POLICY



Consumer perceptions about farm animals

- Trends show high level of public support in the US for greater protection of livestock and poultry
- 2003 Gallup poll: 62% support passing strict laws governing treatment of farm animals
- 2004 survey of Ohioans: 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “farm animals should be protected from feeling physical **pain**”
 - Moral relevance of pain
 - Denial of pain alienates concerned consumers

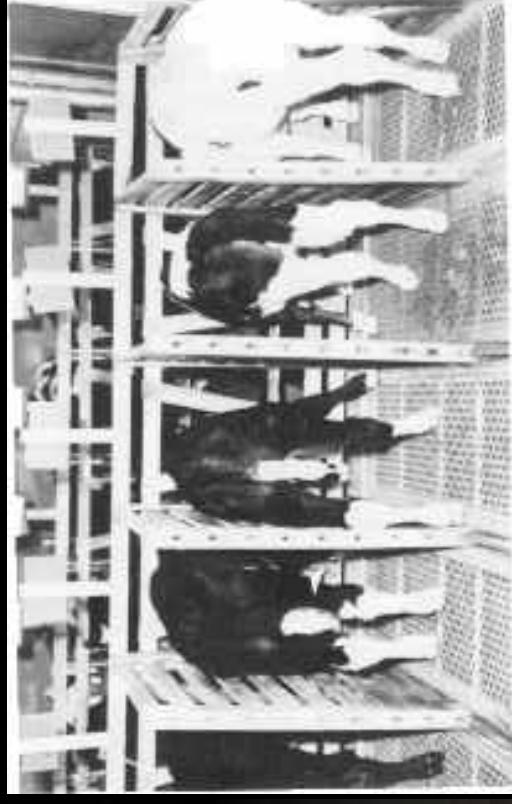


Consumer perceptions about farm animals

- Believe animals have better lives on “small” farms than “large” farms
- 64%: farmers and food companies put their own **profits ahead of treating farm animals humanely**
- 40%: **ethical and moral considerations** should be primarily used to determine how to treat farm animals
- 45%: scientific measures of animal well-being should be primarily used to determine how to treat farm animals

Results of a nationwide telephone survey by Jayson L. Lusk, F. Bailey Norwood & Robert W. Prickett, Aug 17, 2007 at Oklahoma State University, Department of Agric. Economics

Scientific validity vs. social acceptability



Scientifically validated (based on production standards)

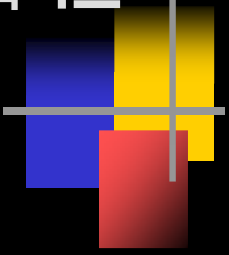
Socially acceptable?

If practices are not aligned with social ethics, impetus to regulate increases & autonomy decreases (Rollin, 1993)



IS THERE A WAY FORWARD FOR THE US DAIRY INDUSTRY?

Incorporating Science & Ethics Into
Education, Communication &
Practice



Incorporating understanding of the public into education efforts

- Understanding the public
 - Trust, details, values, knowing who “the public” is and what they want to know
- **People trust people like them**
 - If our values don’t appear to align with consumers’ values, distrust increases

Messages that increase distrust & add impetus for regulation

- Positioning care as an economic issue, rather than ethical obligation

- “We take care of our animals because if we didn’t, we wouldn’t make any money.”
- Implies that the sole reason for care is profit
- Thus, if profit drops, care is at risk



Education vs. indoctrination

- Transparency & industry ambivalence about full disclosure of standard practices
 - “the public needs to be more educated about animal agriculture”





Take home messages

- It is essential to be proactive: address welfare issues before someone else does; permits autonomy
- Critically analyze practices from scientific & ethical perspectives
 - Does science support our practices?
 - Are practices ethically justifiable?
 - Are they socially acceptable?

Take home messages

- Making the ethical case for dairy production
- Self-regulation
 - Acknowledge & meaningfully address welfare issues
- Transparency & willingness to engage public
 - What is “good” quality of life for a cow?

