Animal welfare landscape: current scientific and consumer challenges

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Farm animal welfare is still a highly contentious topic in the US…
Sorting through the noise

• Which welfare issues take priority?

- Longevity
- Pain
- Structural integrity
- Handling
- Feeding systems
- Slaughter
- Euthanasia
- Transport
- Structural integrity
- Housing systems
Key welfare issues

Animal handling

Pain assessment & alleviation

Intensive confinement

Euthanasia
Laying hen housing systems

- Conventional cage
- Free range outdoor access
- Enriched cage
- Floor pen
Sow housing systems

- Free access stall
- Conventional stall
- Group pen concrete/slats
- Bedded group pen
- Hoop barn
Housing

• Because the advantages and disadvantages of housing systems are qualitatively different, there is no simple or objective way to rank systems for "overall" welfare (AVMA, 2005)

• Risks & outstanding challenges
  – Reducing aggression
  – Feeding & intake
  – Space requirements
  – Public perception
Animal handling

• Undercover video investigations
  – Animal welfare concerns

• Skepticism about videos
  – Inappropriate animal handling
  – Poor worker attitudes
  – Poor worker behaviors

• Is on-farm surveillance needed?
Animal handling

• Outstanding challenges
  – Promoting positive caretaker attitude & on-farm culture
  – Continuing education and supervision
  – Improving downed animal handling
    • Resources (tools, facility design)
Pain is one of the most important aspects of welfare. Associated with routine husbandry/management practices:
- De-horning
- Castration
- Beak & toe trimming
- Tail docking
- Branding

Yet, farm animals often receive no pain control.
Why should we care?

- Practical and scientific implications
  - Comparative anatomy, physiology and behavior data
- Ethical obligations
  - Freedom from pain, injury and disease
  - Maximize welfare = prevent or alleviate pain
  - Increased expectations of veterinarians
- Highly resonant issue for consumers
- → Resonant to retailers
Current challenges

• Identifying pain

• Avoiding/minimizing pain
  – Analgesia
  – Alternative practices
    • Immunological castration
    • Infra-red beak trimming
    • Discouraging some practices
      – e.g., tail docking in dairy cows
CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS

GIVE ME A POUND
OF WHATEVER
REQUIRES THE
LEAST AMOUNT OF
ETHICAL REASONING

MEAT

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Consumer challenges

- Use animal welfare as indicator of food safety
  – Harper & Makatouni, 2002
- Bombarded with information
- Confused about practices & labels
- Welfare concerns/dislikes
  – Animals in boxes
  – Cutting bits/parts off animals
  – Animals in pain/distress
- Relatively unaware of efforts to address welfare
Sources of welfare information

- HSUS, 12%
- PETA, 7%
- American Farm Bureau Association, 3%
- Social Media, 4%
- Other Agricultural Industry Group, 0%
- Other, 2%
- I do not have a source for animal welfare information, 56%
- Federal Governmental Agencies, 5%
- State Governmental Agencies, 2%
- University scientists, [VALUE]
- United Egg Producers (UEP), 0%
- U.S. Poultry & Egg Association, 3%
- National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), 1%
- National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), 1%
- National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), 1%
- HSUS, 12%
- PETA, 7%
- AVMA 2%
- Other, 2%
- I do not have a source for animal welfare information, 56%

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Level of agreement that practices reduce the welfare of pigs (n=798)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production Practice</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Castration (neutering) of male pigs</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confining hogs indoors</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of farrowing crates</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of gestation crates</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing sows in group pens</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear notching for identification</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tail docking</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teeth clipping</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PAIN

1 (Very strongly agree) 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Very strongly disagree)
Perceptions and Impacts on Consumption

• **14%** of survey participants (n = 798) reported decreasing their pork consumption in the past three years due to animal welfare concerns.

• Average reduction of 56% from their previous consumption.

McKendree, Croney and Widmar, 2014
Perception of concern towards animal welfare

More concerned
- Pet ownership
- Animal welfare info source
- Women
- Younger
- Democrats

Less concerned
- From the Midwest
- No information source

Reported drop in pork consumption due to concerns
Implications

- Retailers as new drivers of change

- New conversations needed
  - How to produce food to meet growing demands
  - How to ensure animal welfare regardless of type of production system
  - How to minimize negative economic & environmental impacts
Implications

• Consumers want safe, affordable, food & good animal welfare

• But little use/trust in industry sources and self-regulation

• Trust in vets → unique position

• Potential to facilitate sound care & welfare policy
  – Provide timely information to decision-makers & producers
  – Bridge urban-agricultural divide
What can vets do?

- Increased public concern about animal welfare creates expectation that vets will lead in promoting welfare & not just in animal health (Fraser, 2010)

- Engage broader conception of animal welfare
  - Behavior
  - Physiology
  - Socio-ethical

I’m a professional ... don’t try this at home.
Questions?
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Demographics relative to concerns about welfare

- Urban-rural factors
  - People from rural areas, farming experience view welfare more positively

- Gender, socio-economics, age, family status
  - Women, younger people, those with few children, pet owners, higher incomes and both higher and lower education levels more concerned,
  - Higher tendency of millennials toward environmental concern, activism & communication (via social media)

(Verhue and Verzeijden, 2003; Burrel and Vrieze, 2003; Frewer et al., 2005; Kendall et al., 2006; Farrar, 2007; Banks, 2008; Mckendree et al., 2013)
Farm animal welfare still a highly contentious topic in the US…

What is needed

• Constructive deliberation
  – Balancing human interests (e.g., food demands)
  – Animal welfare
  – Environmental impacts
Perceptions about farm animals

• 50%: animal care is important “when deciding which food to buy, brand preference and which grocery stores to shop” (AMI, 2004, “Laying Out the Facts”)
• 64%: farmers & food companies put profit ahead of treating farm animals humanely (Lusk et al., 2007)
• 76%: disagree that low prices are more important than welfare
• 91%: in order to qualify as “ethical food,” animals should be treated humanely (Context Marketing, Mar 2010)
• 73% of women; 65% of men “have more confidence in food sold in grocery stores that actively support ethical and sustainable farming practices”
Farm animal welfare still a highly contentious topic in the US...

What we have

- Polarized, politicized animal welfare discussions
- Corporate agriculture portrayed as cruel, abusive, unsafe & unsustainable
- Paradigm
  - Conventional = bad
  - Alternative = good