Why animal welfare is critical to the sustainability of the dairy industry

Jennifer Van Os
Assistant Professor
Extension Specialist in Animal Welfare
Is animal welfare a threat to the industry?

Benefits the business

Harms the business

Internal to the business

Strengths

Weaknesses

External to the business

Opportunities

Threats

SWOT

?
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Benefits the business

Harms the business

Internal to the business

External to the business

NO
Inputs = Animal Care

- Housing
- Management
- Handling

Outcome = Animal Welfare

poor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>poor</th>
<th>good</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Poor Housing" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Good Housing" /></td>
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Housing = Animal Care
Animal care is central to dairy farming
Animal care is central to dairy farming

Internal to the business

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SWOT
Consumers have choices

- < 2% of the US population produces food for the rest
- How do we **sustain** our consumer base?
- The dairy industry needs to understand and care about what the other > 98% care about

Where should we put our dollars?
How do we keep consumers choosing dairy?

- Dairy products need to be palatable, literally
- Dairy farming practices need to be palatable – figuratively – in order to maintain “social license”
3 pillars of sustainability

Figure 1 in Invited review: Sustainability of the US dairy industry. von Keyserlingk et al., 2013. J. Dairy Sci. 96:5405-5425.
3 pillars of sustainability

- Are dairy **workers** treated well (esp. immigrant laborers)?
- Are the **animals** treated well?

Figure 1 in Invited review: Sustainability of the US dairy industry. von Keyserlingk et al., 2013. J. Dairy Sci. 96:5405-5425.
Animal welfare beats other social issues

FooDS Demand Survey, Oklahoma State University (n = 48,000)
“Corporate Social Responsibility” is changing food production.
Consumers also have power as voters

1988: MA
71% NO

2016: MA
78% Yes

(state ballot initiatives to regulate farm animal housing)

2002: FL
55% Yes

2006: AZ
62% Yes

2008: CA
64% Yes

2009: OH
64% Yes

Icons from The Noun Project
My journey is an example

Animal lover, raised in Midwest, not from a farm, no ag education
My journey is an example

Animal lover, raised in Midwest, not from a farm, no ag education

College on east coast, gained research experience
Moved to west coast, gained professional experience (not science or ag), wanted to be a “conscientious consumer”

Animal lover, raised in Midwest, not from a farm, no ag education

College on east coast, gained research experience

Where should I put my dollars?

Do I feel good about my food choices?
2008: a pivotal year

Rampant Animal Cruelty at California Slaughter Plant

Undercover investigation finds abuses at major beef supplier to America’s school lunch program

The Humane Society of the United States

Video evidence compiled by The Humane Society of the United States shows inhumane handling methods that may have endangered the health of children.

A shocking undercover investigation by The Humane Society of the United States reveals widespread mistreatment of "downed" dairy cows—those who are too sick or injured to walk—at a Southern California slaughter plant.

January 30, 2008

Slide adapted from Dr. Nigel Cook
Do we need more laws to make sure food animals are raised responsibly?
PhD in Animal Behavior

UC DAVIS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
I learned that the issues aren’t so black & white → science brings evidence to the conversation

Ex: In 2007, the industry produced 1.6x more milk than in 1944, using only 33% of the cows (21% of the animals per unit of milk)

Post-doctoral research in Canada
My goal: a sustainable dairy industry

My research focus: understand and promote good cattle welfare
Animal **rights** is indeed a threat

**Goal:** convince consumers to avoid animal products → end animal ag

**SWOT**

- **Strengths**
- **Weaknesses**
- **Opportunities**
- **Threats**

**Benefits**

**Harms**

**Internal**

**External**

consumers / voters

activists

Icons from The Noun Project
Animal welfare ≠ animal rights

Animal welfare
- Humans have a direct ethical obligation to animals

Animal rights
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Animal welfare ≠ animal rights

Animal welfare
- Humans have a direct ethical obligation to animals
- Maximize quality of life for animals under the care of humans or affected by human actions

Animal rights
- Humans have a direct ethical obligation to animals
- Never justifiable to sacrifice the interests of an animal to benefit another animal or human
activists

Undercover activist video, April 2019
Mission: “exposes cruelty to farmed animals and promotes vegan eating” – COK

Remember – **their** agenda is to turn consumers off of animal production:

“What was documented…is just one of many forms of cruelty inherent in the dairy industry. The surest way to spare calves this kind of pain and suffering is to stop buying cow’s milk and other dairy products and go vegan today.” – PETA

Undercover activist video, April 2019
Remember – their agenda is to turn consumers off of animal production:

“What was documented...is just one of many forms of cruelty inherent in the dairy industry. The surest way to spare calves this kind of pain and suffering is to stop buying cow’s milk and other dairy products and go vegan today.” – PETA

They are counting on the industry NOT being willing or able to improve animal welfare

Mission: “exposes cruelty to farmed animals and promotes vegan eating” – COK
To combat that threat, minimize weaknesses in animal care to remove their ammunition.
Scientific research informs best practices

- What do the animals need to experience good welfare?
- What are the expectations of various human stakeholders?
- How do we provide for these needs and expectations on farm?

**Biological science**: understanding animals

**Social science**: understanding people
Opportunity to provide quality assurance

Strengths
Weaknesses
Opportunities
Threats

Benefits
Harms

Internal
External

Consumers / voters
Producers
Supply chain

Icons from The Noun Project
FARM Program: stated goals

Assure consumers and customers that dairy farmers care for their animals, workforce, and land in a humane and ethical manner

FARM Program: stated goals

Assure consumers and customers that dairy farmers care for their animals, workforce, and land in a humane and ethical manner

- Framework & foundation for on-farm animal care
- Focus on outcomes, science based
- Snapshot of farm management practices
- Create a culture of continuous improvement

### Continuous Improvement

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<td>Voluntary Participation</td>
<td>Mandatory Evaluation Completion</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Increased Accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voluntary Action Plans</td>
<td>Mandatory Corrective Action Plans</td>
<td>Immediate Actions</td>
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<td>Tail-Docking Phase-Out 2022</td>
<td>Critical Control Points</td>
<td>Shortened Timelines</td>
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<td>Probation / Suspension</td>
<td>Implementation Oversight</td>
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99% of U.S. dairy farms now participate
Who makes the decisions?

- **Innovation Center Animal Care Committee**: 40%
- **NMPF Board of Directors**: 60%
- **NMPF Animal Health & Well-Being Committee**: 45%
- **Animal Care/Antibiotic Stewardship Technical Writing Group**: 25%
- **Farmer Advisory Council**: 100%

**Open Comment Period**
- > 370 comments received
- 25%

**Key**:
- Guidance, Input, Ambassadorship
- Recommendations
- Approval
- Farmer Representation
CCQA fills an assurance gap for calves

https://www.CalfCareQA.org/
Opportunity for public engagement

SWOT

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External

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consumers / voters

producers

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Where are consumers getting information?

- 56% who responded to a U.S. survey (n = 798) indicated they did *not* have a source for information on animal welfare.

Where are consumers getting information?

- 56% who responded to a U.S. survey (n = 798) indicated they did *not* have a source for information on animal welfare.
- Of the remaining people who *did* have a source:
  - Over 40% cited animal-rights organizations as their primary source of information about animal welfare!
  - One in five people had reduced their pork consumption in the last 3 years due to animal welfare concerns.

“Consumers today just don’t understand how their food is produced.

If we tell our story better, they will learn the facts and accept how we care for our animals.”

“yes and no…”
Transparency is critical, but insufficient


RESEARCH ARTICLE PLOS ONE

What Difference Does a Visit Make? Changes in Animal Welfare Perceptions after Interested Citizens Tour a Dairy Farm

Beth Ann Ventura¹, Marina A. G. von Keyserlingk¹, Hannah Wittman², Daniel M. Weary¹ *

¹ Animal Welfare Program, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada, ² Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada
knowledge about dairy production practices increased

(education worked to convey facts)
perceptions of dairy production practices did not necessarily improve

(education did not always improve attitudes)
Educational farm visit had variable effects on people’s perceptions of welfare

- 32% became more critical
- 24% had improved perceptions of welfare
- 44% had no change
Perceptions after farm visit improved when shared values were supported

24% had improved perceptions of welfare

A good life means more than “just” health

“Good health is necessary, but insufficient”

Themes: restriction of movement, behavioral opportunities

Perceptions after farm visit worsened when other concerns were not satisfied

32% became more critical

How do we build and maintain public trust?

USDA: Inter-Disciplinary Engagement in Animal Systems

“Societal aspects of animal welfare: Identifying and resolving factors that influence building trust around animal ag [between] consumers and producers to improve animal welfare… Exploring opportunities for greater and meaningful public engagement in the policy and practices of animal ag for improved animal welfare.”
How do we identify shared values?

Are you talking about husbandry (animal care) or compassion (caring)?

Inputs = Animal Care

- Housing
- Management
- Handling
What does caring mean?

Animal welfare and production are often linked – but not always …

“We take care of our animals, and [in return] they take care of us”
What does caring mean?

... and focusing on production benefits can backfire when talking with consumers

“We take care of our animals, and [in return] they take care of us”

Do farmers view their animals as just a means to an end?

“No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care”

“I love the feeling of satisfaction I get when I walk by the pens every day before the sun comes up and see the cows all lying down, quietly chewing their cud.”

- Wisconsin dairy farmer
Take-home message

Animal welfare is key to the sustainability of the dairy industry – but not because it represents a threat.

Animal rights is a threat.

Goal: convince consumers to avoid dairy, end animal ag...
**Take-home message**

Goal of animal **rights** activism: turn consumers away from dairy, end the industry.
To combat that threat, minimize weaknesses in animal care to remove their ammunition.
Animal welfare should be a strength for a dairy operation, not a threat

Jennifer Van Os
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Additional reading

How do we maintain consumer confidence?

Oct. 10 2020
By Jesse Robbins, Beth Ventura, Jennifer Van Os

The public’s perception of animal care influences their purchasing decisions and the way they vote on regulations.

https://hoards.com/article-28808-how-do-we-maintain-consumer-confidence.html
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