



The Human Centred Concerns about Animal Welfare

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Methods

- Literature Review
- Focus Groups
- Ladder Interviews
- Consumers Survey
- Assessment of Strategies
- Dissemination

Results from the Literature Review in the 5 study countries:

Whilst there is a comparable level of concern about animal welfare in the production of food across the five member states – UK, Ireland, Germany, Italy and France – the exact nature of those concerns remain, not only divergent, but to some degree unknown. The number of qualitative studies aimed at investigating the nature of consumer concerns about animal welfare is limited.

- A relatively low spontaneous concern with animal welfare in relation to food production.
- A relatively high expressed concern when consumers are asked specifically about animal welfare in food production.
- More concern with quality, cost and health issues than animal welfare.
- The use of animal welfare as an indicator of food quality, cost and health.
- Lack of knowledge about the specifics of production systems.

Results from the Focus Groups discussions with consumers:

It is clear, from this comparative analysis, that human desire for health, quality and safety supersedes concerns about animal welfare. Where animal welfare is expressed as a concern, the prioritised factors are used as indicators and justification for a high level of animal welfare. Often, animal welfare is both implicitly and explicitly traded against issues of cost, convenience and availability. Willingness to pay is obviously affected by these contingencies.

Meaninngs of Animal Welfare:

There were common key concepts used to define animal welfare, most notably 'humane' and 'natural'. Participants generally believed that whilst humans had the right to rear and kill animals for food, they should do so in a humane way. Meanings of 'humane' was usually associated with being 'cared for', not suffering, and having as good a life and death as possible. Being humane, as previously discussed, sanitised the process of animal production and ameliorated any sense of guilt associated with the consumption of animal-based products. Allowing animals to express their 'natural' behaviour, to be fed with 'natural' food and to live as 'naturally' as possible further defined the concept of welfare. The 'natural', with all its associated sanctimonious meanings, provided a ready-made justification for disapproval of various systems and methods. The participants felt generally ill informed about these issues.

Consumers are particularly concerned about ‘unnatural’ and ‘unhealthy’ additives, such as antibiotics and hormones. These concerns are magnified if the consumer has children, in which case the parent may prohibit certain types of food (notably beef and genetically modified food) from the children’s diet. The type of food safety concern is dependent on current media campaigns in each country, for example, salmonella in Italy, genetically modified food in the UK.

Consumers do not prioritise animal welfare as a spontaneous concern about food.

Results of the ladder interviews in the 5 study countries:

The results indicate that consumers are equally motivated by human health (anthropocentric) concerns as they are about animal welfare (zoocentric) concerns. Indeed, consumers often use animal welfare as an indicator of other product attributes, such as quality and safety, thus supporting the findings of the previous focus groups. There appear to be no significant differences amongst the countries in the types of values consumers use to motivate their concern about animal welfare.

Consumers concern about animal welfare in the production of food is significantly motivated by the perceived relation amongst poor welfare conditions, food safety, and the effects on human health. Consumers generally believe that modern, intensive production is ‘unnatural’ and, consequently, unhealthy. Consumers with children are principally concerned about the health and well being of those children. Their concern about animal welfare conditions is propelled by their sense of responsibility to their children and their families, in general.

Results of the Consumers Survey:

The results reveal that consumption patterns of meat have shifted from red to white meat mainly due to health reasons. Animal welfare concerns are virtually insignificant in terms of changing consumption patterns overall. The most important reasons for change in consumption are health, BSE, changes in diet, lifestyle and household composition, and cost. Consumers scored higher on the zoocentric scale of animal welfare compared to the anthropocentric scale. Production methods for eggs, poultry and veal production are all rated unacceptable. All attributes were rated important with the most important attribute of animal welfare being the quality of the animal's feed.

There is variation amongst countries in proportion of consumers who have either reduced or substituted consumption due to animal welfare concerns. Of those consumers, the vast majority selected free-range eggs. Barriers to consumption of animal-friendly product vary according to country. Consumers are most informed about egg production, followed by milk and poultry. They report that they are uninformed about beef, lamb, pork and finally veal production. Consumers trust campaign organisations more than producers, retailers and policy-makers. Those organisations which consumers think should be responsible for animal welfare are at odds with those which they rate as actually taking responsibility. Gender and social class are predictors of attitudes to animal welfare and, subsequent food choice.

Conclusions

- Farm Animal Welfare in consumers' mind is associated with human health
- The relevance of human centred concerns for animal welfare is strongly affected by media coverage of food scandals (BSE, Salmonella, Dioxin)
- Lack of information on modern rearing systems is promoting distrust towards producers and retailers
- Concern for human centred farm animals welfare is affecting food shopping behaviour of target groups of consumers: young highly educated women, mothers with small children.