

Farm Animal Welfare and Sustainability

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Submitted by Alison Hodge to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Geography in December 2010

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with acknowledging farm animals and their co-presence in the more-than-human space of the livestock farm, and with accounting for them responsibly in sustainability debates. The enrolment of farm animals as actors in political agendas for environmental sustainability, and farm animal welfare suggests that there are new ways of seeing and being with farm animals that permit their relational presence and recognise their subjectivity. Indeed geographers have in recent years acknowledged animals and their relations with humans, and they have begun to recognise the nature of animal subjectivities. However, within the fundamental rethinking of animals that has been provoked by these discussions, I suggest that farm animals have remained relatively invisible. Occupying ethically confusing terrain, farm animals have nonetheless been visible in a set of philosophical positions regarding their moral status, yet these debates present a rather confusing picture in which the farm animal as an individual is conspicuous by its absence.

In seeking to redress the invisibility of farm animals within these debates, and recast them in relation to humans and the broader farm ecology, this thesis attempts to set out an epistemological and methodological framework through which farm animals might become visible as individual fleshy beings. Drawing on the concept of agricultural stewardship and new agendas in farm animal welfare science, it makes use of new methodological tools that have emerged in the social sciences to conduct a relational study of the livestock farm; a study in which farm animals themselves participate. It also considers how the divisions that have been constructed between humans, farm animals and the environment can be re-configured as a more unified political science of the livestock farm.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the support of all the individuals and organisations who have contributed information and assistance during the preparation of this research. I am particularly indebted to the farmers, veterinary's and all of the interviewees that have given up their time to participate, and to the farm animals that I have had the privilege to meet and observe as I have sought to gain insight into their animalian lives. Without their involvement this research would not have been possible.

Special thanks must go to my supervisor Professor Henry Buller for his patience and encouragement throughout the research project. I am also very grateful to both the Economic and Social Research Council and the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme for making this research possible by providing me with a studentship (award number PTA-224-2005-00004) which is linked to research award number RES-224-25-0041 2005-2007 'Eating Biodiversity: An Investigation of the Links Between Quality Food Production and Biodiversity Protection'.

Finally, I would like to say a very special thank you to my partner Steve Whiteley, and our children Adele and Corinne for their encouragement, patience and understanding throughout the inevitable peaks and troughs of this research.

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