

# **Food and Animal Welfare**

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# **Food and Animal Welfare**

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We dedicate this book to the next generation of protein eaters, including Lewis, Elliot and Amélie

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## *Introduction*

### *Food and Animal Welfare*

We largely take farm animals' lives (and deaths) for granted when we eat them and their products. For most of us, meat, egg and dairy consumption has become so distinct - geographically, morally, aesthetically - from livestock production that the animal 'disappears'. The very vocabulary of food often denies its animalian origin, principally to protect our own sensibilities either as carnivores or as co-animals (Twigg, 1979; Goldenberg, 2001; Evans and Miele, 2012). Packaging, presentation and labelling intentionally obscure the animal corporeality and liveliness behind the product (Vialles, 1994). Animals, if they are represented, often take an abstract and idealised form, close enough to suggest authenticity but distant enough to absolve responsibility. The worlds of consumption and production seem further apart than ever. They have become, in Goodman's (2002: 272) words, 'autonomous, 'purified' categories of social life, sites only skeletally connected through the act of purchase'. If historically, domestic farm animals were considered subsidiary members of the human community (Thomas, 1983), towards the end of the nineteenth century it was already clear that 'the gulf was now very much wider between human needs on the one hand and human sensibilities on the other' (Thomas, 1983: 191). The industrialization and intensification of animal husbandry, coupled with the increasingly cheaper cost of animal products, a rapidly expanding urban consumer market and new retail and processing technologies, have all contributed to a process that both distances animals from animal products while at the same time de-animalizing the latter (Guzman and Kjaernes, 1998; Buller, 2012). 'Most Americans', write Singer and Mason (2008: 37), 'know little of how their eggs are produced'. Regular annual surveys by the organization LEAF show surprisingly and consistently high proportions of young Britons unaware, for example, that bacon comes from pigs or milk from cows (LEAF, 2015). Of course, such distancing serves the animal production sector well. As Shukin (2009:21) puts it: 'Rather than undermining the hegemony of market life, the contradictions of animal rendering are productive so long as they are discursively managed under the separate domains of culture and economy'. In terms of the broader universe of human/animal relations, consumers meanwhile both have their 'critters' *and* eat them.

The central argument of this original book, written by two social scientists/geographers with a strong scientific and ethical commitment to bringing a social science understanding to farm animal care and welfare, is that concern for the welfare of farm animals (whether that concern is interpersonal, scientific, moral, gastronomic, aesthetic, social or economic or indeed a combination of these) constitutes a significant and vital linkage between the processes and the acts of consumption and production. Those links can be explicit or implicit, overt or hidden. They are rendered visible, or obscured, for a range of reasons, running from ethical engagement and anthropomorphic excess to economization, purposeful market segmentation and profitability. In drawing attention, first, to the corporeal materiality of animals as future food as well as to the feelings and psychological experiences of farmed animals and, second, to the practices of care,

responsibility and attention afforded those animals by those who work alongside them, we argue that concern for the welfare of farmed animals fosters an inter-species communion of relationality and inter-dependence within the food chain that, whether we like it or not, implicates us more directly in the lives of those we eat and in the quality and value of those lives. Yet those interdependencies are mediated in a variety of different ways by different actors for different ends. Untangling such mediations is our goal.

Since the 1970s, farm animal welfare has emerged as a major consideration in the rules and standards governing animal production across a wide range of countries and global regions. In October 2016, the United Nations Committee on World Food Security published its 'Proposed draft recommendations on sustainable agricultural development for food security and nutrition including the role of livestock' (UN CFS, 2016). Recommendation 'D' of Article VIII, entitled 'Animal health and welfare' reads:

Improve animal welfare delivering on the five freedoms and related OIE standards and principles, including through capacity building programs, and supporting voluntary actions in the livestock sector to improve animal welfare (CFS, 2016: 2)

Animal welfare concerns are having an increasingly important impact upon the way animals are farmed, transported and slaughtered, upon the structures, institutions and regulations that accompany these processes and upon the individual practices of husbandry and care. Animal welfare concerns affect how animal products are prepared, selected, identified, sold, and consumed. In many parts of the world, animal welfare is a significant factor in the segmentation of product markets and an increasingly important ethical concern in consumer choice. Finally, it is, we must hope, improving the lives of those animals that are farmed.

Those lives should be 'worth living' (FAWC, 2009). Recent food scares in the UK and Europe such as Foot and Mouth, BSE and bird flu, the emergence of more ethical forms of food consumption, even the topical engagement of Celebrity Chefs, have all contributed to this growing profile of this issue, one to which the retailers and food manufacturers, as well as producers and consumers, are increasingly responding. In this way, how a farm animal lives, the quality of its life and the materialisation of that quality, become critical elements in linking together issues of food production and food consumption.

Animal welfare permeates the entirety of the food chain, transcending the traditional divisions between production and consumption, between farm and fork, from the animal body that is 'created' and cared for to the carcass that is rendered and the steak that is eaten. Yet this permeation is only partially acknowledged. In many ways it is hidden, differentially and selectively made visible at diverse stages in the food chain, for a variety of reasons. As the science of animal welfare as a distinctive branch of veterinary science, applied ethology and animal biology has developed, so too have the (bio)-politics and the ethics of animal farming and animal care, opening the necessity, we maintain for a more critical social science investigation of animal welfare, its practice, its science, its commodification and its governance (Bock and Buller, 2013). New regulatory and institutional frameworks have developed and new political and economic actors have emerged. Despite this, the constitution of animal welfare, its definition, its practice and its ethical resonances within the food chain are not fixed. They are, we argue, differentially constructed, mobilised, negotiated and practiced at varied points and through multiple processes. It is here, that a social science perspective has a distinct and, we would argue, critical contribution to make to the study of farm animal welfare and its negotiated place within the food chain as a consideration of both production and consumption.

This book proposes an original and multiple examination of these various actions to consider the integrative (and disintegrative) nature of farm animal welfare as an analytical frame and lens for studying the geographies, economies, cultures, practices and politics of the food sector. Drawing in part upon recent empirical research undertaken by the authors themselves over the last few years, both individually and together, it offers a unique look at those farm animal lives, how they are cared for, how that care becomes defined and assessed as welfare, how this impacts upon and becomes part of what defines product value and quality, how it moves through the food chain (from property of a life to property of a product) and is marketed, sold and eventually consumed. We are interested in this volume to explore how concern for the welfare of farm animals is translated into strategies and practices of care and, to use Haraway's (2008: 71) ingenious turn of

phrase, 'response-ability' both on farm and beyond into the supply chain to include processors, retailers, consumers. We seek to explore, through case studies, how local cultural politics and practices within and across national boundaries shape the practice and feasibility of various welfare and care strategies. In short, our central objective in this book is to explore how the welfare of individual animal lives, differentially defined by cultural values, by objective science and by the shared corporealities of animal and keeper becomes assembled, transited and redefined as it is mobilised through the food chain from site of production to site of consumption. Our argument is that consideration for the welfare of the animal, whether scientific, ethical or simply pecuniary, is a variable relational achievement, differentially constructed and differentially expressed but which nevertheless offers a crucial connectivity (whether explicit or concealed) between production and consumption.

To do this, we draw upon a range of cognate conceptual and theoretical positions. Our analysis is located within both contemporary food studies (Goodman, 1999, 2001) and the maturing domain of animal studies (Buller, 2014). Recent writing on post-humanism (Wolfe 2010) and more-than-human worlds (Whatmore, 2006; Bastien et al. 2017) inform this investigation as does the work of Callon (1998) and others on commodification and economization. We draw in particular upon scholars such as Haraway (2008), Despret (2006) Porcher (2016) and Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) all of whom, in various ways, interrogate how shared and caring relationships between humans and (in our case, captive) animals matter, or might matter. 'That mattering', writes Haraway (2008: 70), 'is always inside connections that demand and enable response, not bare calculation or ranking'. 'Response', she goes on, 'of course grows with the capacity to respond, that is, responsibility', and a little later on in the same passage: 'animals in all their worlds, are response-able in the same sense as people are; that is responsibility is a relationship crafted in intra-action through which entities, subjects and objects, come into being' (2008: 71). We seek in this book to explore and trace that 'responsibility' as it is differentially manifested (and given value) throughout the food chain. Because, animal welfare is a curious blend of naturalist animal science and human ethics, values and behaviour (Fraser, 1999; Sandoe et al, 2003), we draw too upon science and technology studies in this volume, interrogating the science and qualification of animal welfare, both negative and positive, within the contested biopolitics where the supply of animal lives and the demands of human markets interact (Shukin 2009).

Of course, farmed animals are consumed and their bodies and body processes exploited by human kind all over the world. In this book, however, our geographical and socio-cultural coverage is, perhaps inevitably, limited largely, but not exclusively, to the Global North and, in particular to Europe. Certainly, our own predominantly UK perspective on farm animal welfare, its definition and conceptualization, its societal impact and its economic role within food supply chains, leads perhaps to a major emphasis in the analysis being placed upon highly industrialised and commercialised animal agricultural systems feeding into centralised and corporate retail sectors where consumer demands are regarded as both powerful and diverse. As a result, other formations of husbandry, processing and commercialization, along with other culturally specific interpretations of animal welfare and human societal concern for it, are not so systematically addressed here. Our only justification for this, apart from the fact that it unavoidably reflects our own personal trajectories, is that increasingly it is this broadly generalisable 'northern' industrial model (rather than simply geographical provenance) that is responsible for the majority of animal products (particularly, poultry, pigs and eggs) available for human consumption across the world..

Throughout the book, we combine critical and reflective review and analysis with data and observation drawn from our own empirical, policy-related and ethnographic work. Our recent and on-going collaborations with farm animal welfare scientists, applied ethologists, veterinarians, policy-makers and others in the UK, Sweden, the US, Hungary and China have both inspired and contributed to the current volume. We have drawn heavily on this and other research, from our joint involvement in the EU funded Welfare Quality project (Buller and Roe, 2008, 2010) and in collaborative work on the commodification of poultry welfare (Buller and Roe, 2013), to individually undertaken research on-farms (Buller, 2012; Roe and Greenhough, 2014), in slaughterhouses (Roe, 2010; Buller, 2016), within veterinary practices (Buller, 2015b), in animal laboratories (Greenhough and Roe, 2011) and both alongside and within academic research institutions and policy-advisory bodies.

In addition to more conventional styles of review and analysis, we have incorporated into the book in a number of places narrative and observational accounts of specific encounters with

farmers, animal carers and animal welfare researchers both in the UK and elsewhere (notably China). These we present as distinct and intentional departures from the style of the rest of the book in the hope that they provide concrete and in-depth examples of how specific forms and practices of animal care and welfare assessment become enrolled into processes of food chain qualification and commodification. In all of this, we offer a unique and original social science perspective, one that we argue is much needed, on the transitioning and transformative place, practice and policy of animal welfare throughout the food system.

The book is comprised of seven chapters. In the first of these we bring together two, until now, relatively distinct areas of scholarship that are seldom conceptualised together other than in a singularly instrumentalist fashion; food studies and animal studies. We begin by situating the study of farm animals and farm animal welfare within contemporary food studies literature, defining such study as occupying a complex place within this now substantive scholarship, yet one particularly open to an integrative inter-disciplinary analytical perspective. We then trace the emergence of farm animals and their welfare as a relatively new theme in recent social science, and explore the intellectual lineage of current scientific engagements with animals, non-human bodies and human/animal care relations, particularly through human/animal studies and animal geographies. Our argument in this opening chapter is that the welfare of farm animals – as a component of animal subjectivity, an element of objectified product quality and a factor in consumer choice - pervades the entire food chain offering the possibility for a more analytically coherent perspective on the hitherto distinctive worlds of production and those of consumption.

The second chapter of the book explores in some depth how formal concern for the welfare of farmed animals has emerged over the last half century in the global north, and particularly in Europe and the USA and how it is currently expressed and articulated through three distinct forms of engagement. The first of these is scientific engagement, and we trace the manner in which the welfare of farmed animals becomes a distinct and calculable object of a distinctive science and scientific epistemology, one that has, in its fifty or so years of existence, shifted significantly from an early mechanistic and essentially productivist approach to one that is arguably, and in part at least, far more qualitative and individualistic today. The scientific measurability of welfare has, however, rendered it more visible, prompting the development of our second and third engagements. On the one hand, there has been an emergent ethical engagement with the welfare of farm animals. Here, we chart the ethical concern for the welfare of farm animals that has been a keen component of late twentieth century social engagement leading, most commonly, to selective consumer preference. On the other hand, the measurability and calculation of levels of positive and negative welfare have permitted the enrolment of farm animal welfare into differential expressions of product quality and the segmentation of animal product markets. Drawing, in part, on the work of Callon, we explore, in this final part of the chapter, how welfare has become established as 'economic'.

In Chapter Three, we take our first step back from the broader more synthetic analysis of categories and trends in the relationship between farm animal welfare and the food system offered in Chapter 2 to present a more specific and detailed examination of distinct on-farm practices, where care is performed and enacted at the inter-individual human/animal level. Taking Mol et al's (2010) insistence on care as practice (a practice that, in the case of livestock farming, can no longer be seen as a simple alternative to technology), and Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017: 5) notion of care as a 'concrete work of maintenance', we explore the differing dimensions of labour, affect and ethics that contribute, at least in part, to the welfare of individual farm animals (both as knowledge/science and as practice), even in those moments where, as Puig de la Bellacasa (ibid) points out, one or more of these might be withheld or absent. Employing a more distinctive narrative style, this third chapter of the book draws upon observational and ethnographic fieldwork research undertaken by Roe in 2009 on the work of farm animal carers. It explores closely the demands and practices of caring for animals within the economy of food production with a view to establishing care as a form of interspecies *naturesociety* practice that becomes embodied within the welfare of the animal's life and ultimately the 'quality' of the animal product. The chapter also discusses the topic of making an animal kill-able through empirical observations of when and how killing takes place on the farm for those animals that don't make it into the formal human food supply chain. The chapter closes by exploring the individual challenges for those tasked with making decisions or actually performing the kill.

The fourth chapter turns away from the farm and from lived animal lives to focus more

directly on the food product, and the mechanisms by which the materialised matter of welfare (Roe, 2010) becomes commodified, marketed and ultimately consumed as a component of product 'quality'. We show how the welfare of farmed animals is increasingly used as a means of differentiating products and segmenting markets within food retailing through a series of what Callon et al. (2007) refer to as 'market devices' such as certification, assurance, auditing and labelling. In this chapter, which borrows much from work we have done on the construction and placing of farm animal welfare within the food processing and retailing sectors (Roe and Higgin 2008; Buller and Roe 2010; Buller and Roe, 2012; Buller, 2013a; Buller, 2013a) we trace four 'steps' (responsibilisation, segmentation, assurance and labelling) demarcating the successive mechanisms by which welfare 'claims' are made, marketized, governed and enacted through different stages of the food processing and retailing chain.

The fifth and sixth chapters expand the scope of the book by extending our analysis of welfare in the human food chain to the exploration of different national contexts and experience. We are interested here in investigating how the growth of broad societal concern for farm animal welfare, how the maturity of animal welfare science and how the advent of an increasingly far-reaching governance regime (which is both regulation and market-led), all increasingly prevalent in Western European and North American states, impacts upon the food chain organization and production/consumption relations within other states where there has not been little traditional engagement in these areas. Hence, chapter 5 examines differences across Europe in how the retail market for higher animal welfare friendly food products has operated, with particular attention to Hungary's capacity, as a relatively new EU Member State, to address farm animal welfare, and the EU regulatory and policy regime to which it has signed up as a condition of entry. In Chapter 6, we return to the more in-depth ethnographic and narrative style employed in Chapter 3. Using extracts from field notebooks and interview transcripts from ethnographic research undertaken by one of the current book's authors (Roe) in 2009, this chapter looks in detail at the emergence of farm animal welfare in China during the period 2007-09 and the key role played by international animal welfare organizations in driving the Chinese welfare agenda.

In the final chapter of the book we come back to our starting question: how, through the processes of food production and consumption, and, to what degree, can we actively engage with the lives (and with actively improving the lives) of those farmed animals upon whom we largely (rightly or wrongly) depend for food and other commodities. What we are looking for in this final section are contemporary and novel mechanisms of ethical connectivity between the consumer of, for example, meat and eggs and the lived lives of cattle and hens; mechanisms that reach across the distinctions between the human/animal proximities of production and the human/animal distances of consumption, between welfare as lived non-human animal experience and welfare as 'value added', between the intimate practices of caring for and detached practices of caring about. For the moment at least, there is little real alternative to animal farming as a means of meeting the protein requirements of our ever-expanding humanity, though there are suggested alternative animals that might be more appropriately farmed. Our perhaps naive hope is that, even within the inevitably asymmetrical bio-political-capital agencies of inter-species animal farming, there are better ways of overcoming the inherent and normative objectification through which non-human animal lives become human food products. Part of that process must include a reimagining of our interdependencies and what we ultimately share with non-human animals.