

# Animal Welfare: What Are The Concerns of the Bovine Practitioner ?

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What are the concerns of the bovine practitioner for the Animal Welfare issue ? Do the people who help assure the adequacy and wholesomeness of major components of our food supply differentiate Animal Welfare from "Animal Rights" ? This presentation will reflect on the "Animal Welfare-Animal Rights" issue hopefully expressing some viewpoints and concerns of the bovine practitioner.

What did I know about the Animal Welfare movement? I had tried to keep pace with the issues. I had often discussed the "Animal Welfare" movement with colleagues. Superficially, I thought I was informed. I found, however, that there was a great deal to learn.

I was fortunate to participate in the Boyne Mountain Conference: *Animal Agriculture-Research to Meet Human Needs in the 21st Century (1)*— a conference consisting of several hundred people who looked at research needs in Animal Agriculture from many aspects: Human Nutrition, Food Processing, Animal Nutrition Genetics, Digestive Physiology and so forth also including Animal Health. A participant in that conference and a member of the Animal Health Group was a representative of the Animal Welfare Institute. Incidentally, not a raving extremist or a little old (concerned but unknowledgable) lady in tennis shoes-but rather a person who asked penetrating questions about stress; about pain in animals and also listened—listened I thought to the character of research thrusts.

Research imperatives from that conference did not deal directly with Animal Welfare issues. However, intrinsic to several of the imperatives were concerns about the well being of food animals:

- a) the development of buildings to promote maximum performance of animals confined.
- b) the need to examine the multifactorial interactions which contribute to production diseases.

A concluding statement of the Animal Health section admonished: "as we approach and plan for the 21st century, giving attention to the availability, wholesomeness and nutrient quality of food products of animal origin we should not lose sight that this is obtainable through life . . . animal life. The comfort and well being of animals in production units should not be in conflict with production efficiencies as an optimum physiological state should enhance the

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*Paper presented at the 15th Annual AABP Convention, Nashville, TN on December 1, 1982.*

opportunity to reach the objective of food-animal agriculture."

I was familiar—I had read it—with Chou and Harmon's book on *Critical Food Issues of the Eighties (2)* where they pointed out that livestock in developing nations serve as "important sources of food, fiber, dietary improvement as well as income, power, fuel and fertilizer. That these livestock represent a mobile living food reservoir equalling present world wide grain reserves" not concentrated in a few surplus nations. That (according to Chou & Harmon) "significant advances in technology can be expected in the combined areas of better feeding, genetic improvements, enviromental regulation and disease control. In developing nations Poverty, Malnutrition and Safe Water Supplies are still primary concerns. (The implication is, compared to concerns that we have the luxury to debate because of our status.)

Chou and Harmon (2) discussed the theme that systems of rearing animals should be advanced to maximize productivity and that there should be no regulatory or financial constraints imposed on "technologies relating to improved environments for livestock". Here they stepped lightly into an expression concerning Public Policy—that man will have the resources to raise animals for food; a concept in conflict with the Animal Rights' thrust, as we shall see, where man will liberate the animal as a source of food.

I obtained a copy of the CAST (*Council for Agricultural Science and Technology*) Report (No. 91) (3) issued in November, 1981. This report dealt with or perhaps reacted to the Scientific Aspects of the Welfare of Food Animals. I'd advocate if you haven't read it you should (Dr. Curtis was a member of the Task Force that prepared the Report). I believe it to be a scientifically addressed expression of issues associated with Animal Production and Animal Welfare.

I had read Herrick's article in the January-February 1982 issue of *Animal Nutrition and Health (4)* in which he reported on the meeting between representatives of major poultry, livestock and veterinary organizations and key animal welfare enthusiasts who voiced basic concerns for animal welfare apparently species by species. An analysis of Dr. Herrick's article (meaning measuring with a six-inch ruler the amount of space devoted to the welfare concern by species) indicated that the animal welfare enthusiasts focused concerns heavily on swine and poultry production—about 5¼ inches each; veal calves were next at about 3

inches, then sheep, approximately 2¼ inches; then dairy cattle at 1 inch and beef cattle at about ¾ of an inch. Hence, from our point of view the space-concern relationship for all of the cattle didn't nearly equal that for either poultry or swine. Surprisingly the CAST report (3) placed very similar emphasis regarding a species and text space relationship. (7½ pages to poultry production and associated factors and issues; 4½ pages to swine; about 7⅓ pages for all ruminants—beef and dairy cattle, veal calves and sheep). What does this rather juvenile approach to analysis mean? Probably not much, although a conclusion could be reached that on the whole, aside from the veal calf situation, the cattle industries are by and large not targets of overt concern about animal welfare.

Although as reported in Dr. Herrick's article (4) the major complaints regarding dairy cattle were for prolonged stanchion tying; "dirty pens, yards and pastures; handling of sick and injured animals without proper veterinary care; castrating and dehorning of adult animals (I assume when done without the aid of appropriate anesthesia) and floor surfaces that are detrimental to safe footing. That's not so bad, I fuss about some of those things in herds all the time and I've been with some of you and heard similar admonishments about the same thing—to a measure we call it Herd Health. (So far as beef cattle were concerned the welfarists apparently opposed "hot brands, adult castration and dehorning, abuse at public markets, lack of control or supervision of truckers handling the cattle, overstocking and confinement on slatted flooring.")

I guess I wasn't still really attuned to the issues. An article in the "Editorial Viewpoint" section of the July 1, 1982 *JAVMA* (5) caught my eye. It had been excerpted from the March 1982 "Scientists Center Newsletter" and in the *JAVMA* it carried the designation "Animal Rights." I'd like to quote it:

"Intensive confinement systems for farm animals are conceived in the interests of productive efficiency. In strictly economic terms, animals have the same status as the machinery in which they are confined. They are a resource. But apart from the uses to which we might wish to put them, animals have lives of their own. Machines do not have lives of their own. Human beings and animals do. It is an abuse of animals to treat them as if they were merely factors of production. It is an abuse of what they are. The debate about intensive confinement systems tends to be centered on the concept of animal welfare. Some criticisms emphasize that animals should not be subjected to avoidable pain and suffering. Other criticisms focus on the objectives of good health and longevity. As important as these concerns are it seems to me (The author of this article) that welfare is not the crux of the matter. The crux is whether animals are unduly impeded from pursuing their own lives . . ."

The thrust of this excerpt (and it is apparently what polarizes) is not just the humane treatment of animals which

are maintained within a system for some definable utilitarian purpose but rather the maintenance of the animal for the animal. Dr. Edward ("Bud") Ames of the AVMA staff recently pointed out (6), "the condition of health and general well-being of animals is what the AVMA Animal Welfare Committee means by animal welfare. Animal Rights is a new concept going beyond animal welfare, a concept meaning different things to different people." Ames (6) says that two books, *Animal Machines* by Ruth Harrison and *Animal Liberation* (7) by Peter Singer may have been the stimulation for present interest in animal welfare, animal rights and related issues. I hadn't read either of these. Have you? *I have now*. I obtained Singer's book from the library and was surprised to find that it had all of the physical evidence of having been extensively used . . . or abused. There were marks in the margins, underlined passages—little notes about "animal lib and women's lib". I want to spend a little time with you and Mr. Singer's book *Animal Liberation*. The reason for this is that until now in order to present the concerns of the bovine practitioner I built a case along the lines of the definition of animal welfare as advanced by the AVMA Animal Welfare Committee, really the humane treatment of animals which are to be used for food. With this in mind then, we could fuss and argue about the degree of implementation of things the basis of which we're probably all in agreement on. This means we'd be arguing along a common utilitarian path. However, as has been pointed out when we're talking about Animal Rights, we may be dealing with ideological issues that from the view of the utilitarian could be perceived as inflexible. Does Mr. Singer's book present issues from the utilitarian view point? No, I'm afraid not! Mr. Singer's (7) book is divided into six chapters, the preface, and acknowledgements section, three appendices and a section containing eight photographs. In the preface to *Animal Liberation* Mr. Singer says that the book is about the tyranny of human over nonhuman animals. Mr. Singer as a graduate student at the University of Oxford—specializing in moral and social philosophy—became a vegetarian. The book *Animal Liberation* contains the following chapters:

- "I All animals are Equal . . .  
or why the supporters of liberation for Blacks and Women should support Animal Liberation Too"
- "II Tools for Research . . .  
or what the public doesn't know it is paying for."
- "III Down on the Factory Farm . . .  
or what happened to your dinner when it was still an animal."
- "IV Becoming a Vegetarian . . .  
or how to reduce animal suffering and human starvation at the same time."
- "V Man's Dominion . . .  
A short history of speciesism"
- "VI Speciesism Today . . .  
defenses, rationalizations, and objections to Animal Liberation."

The Appendices are:

last: Organizations—a listing of organizations in Britain and the United States that “are working for radical changes in our attitudes to, and treatment of, nonhuman animals.”

second: Further Reading: a listing describing 10 works dealing with animal welfare, and vegetarianism. Included are texts described as radical. Singer describes Ruth Harrison’s *Animal Machines* (London, Stuart 1964) as “The first book to reveal the effects of factory farm techniques on animal welfare. Still the best source of information on many aspects of modern farming.” As I said previously, I haven’t read it but I assume that this statement—“the best source of information on many aspects of modern farming”—probably doesn’t refer to the formulation of a Total Mixed Ration or the operation of milking equipment.

The first appendix: Cooking for Liberated People—a listing of equipment and shopping hints for cooking vegetarian and then . . . recipes

What are the concerns of bovine practitioners about Animal Welfare? From a cynical point of view I could say they think things are pretty good; that there is no problem—that we’re dealing with sensationists; that it will die away; we make too much of it. When I concluded Singer’s book I was acutely aware that even with routine trying I wasn’t satisfactorily informed about the Animal Rights issue. I sat down and wrote out a list of names, bovine practitioners I knew in all districts. I’d conduct a minisurvey, far from statistically relevant—no, it wasn’t randomized or stratified. I pledged to each that I wouldn’t identify sources, I tried to question in a format that was similar from person to person. The calls were placed in the evening or on a weekend hopefully to promote a chat rather than a hurried call. The questions with some variation were:

a) *What do you think of the animal welfare issue?*

Responses were highly mixed—from “its overplayed; we have to put up with it and accept it as coming from misguided people” to “I don’t think the issue is welfare, it’s rights and I have difficulty understanding morally that animals have rights in the sense man has rights. They sure are entitled to humane treatment and care.” Many thought the issues were principally directed to the poultry and swine industries; most also thought that current methods of large scale veal production are questionable. Although one practitioner said he wasn’t convinced that a veal calf was as bored and going crazy as “they’d like us to believe.”

b) *Who are they: Have you met any outright animal rightists?*

None had—the response to who “they” are also varied from—“they are people who are misguided, not really understanding what it takes to produce food from animals” to “they’re people really feathering their own nests” to “they’re well educated, articulate, probably mostly urban origin”, “you know they get on us; on farmers, on the production people, maybe they ought to get on the engineer.”

c) *Do you see problems of a welfare nature?*

There was usually some silence; I’d be silent too. All except one thought they had; most questioned the veal operations; most thought we’d have to make “extra sure” that dehorning and castration were done in a painless manner educating our producers on the right approach. Most thought that when performance was satisfactory in confinement operations there wasn’t really issues of welfare. One thought the dairy cow was better off, from a welfare point of view, today than at any time—“more exercise; more appropriate nutrition; better milking facilities to “I get so ---tired of seeing some of the ways dairy cattle are handled. If some individuals had to be a cow there would be some fast rights.”

d) *What should we do about the animal welfare movement?*

Invariably the answer was to educate, inform both the public and the animal welfare people. “Especially the Public.” One said, “you know sometimes I have a hard time figuring out if my responsibility is to the animal or the client. I almost always try to help the animal by working with the client.”

Overall

— I was proud of the people I talked with!

— I found no cynicism.

— I found concern for the equitable humane treatment of animals. I found they questioned some production methods. I found people who over the past years have changed procedures so that pain would be eliminated during procedures. I found invariably the desire to communicate with the animal welfare people and our segment of the profession—but an equal desire for that communication to be open minded.

— I found, in some, a concern that a reasonable philosophy or posture on animal welfare will not be put forth to the public. A concern that the people who don’t produce food won’t fairly find out about its production. A concern that our children understand production methods.

To me a surprising concern that came across—at least in two conversations—was the concern that the welfare issue would interfere with biomedical research. Also, overall, the people I talked with equated the Animal Welfare-Rights Movement principally to a concern for humane treatment of animals. They did not, on the average, associate it with an attempt to instill a major ideological change.

**To Conclude**

**When we equate the term animal welfare to mean humane care all of us pretty much think alike. All desire humane care. However in regards to the term Animal Rights, I wonder if we’re all not a bit naive, complacent and ill informed and . . . continuing to talk to ourselves.**

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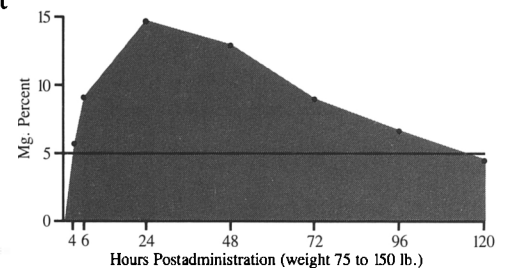
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