

Direct Versus Indirect Questioning: An Application to the Well-Being of Farm Animals

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Abstract Recent events suggest people are increasingly concerned not just with their own well-being but that of animals as well. However, there is little systematic evidence on people's willingness-to-trade their own well-being and quality of life for improvements in the well-being of farm animals. In this paper, we utilize a straightforward and unobtrusive technique to mitigate socially desirability effects and gage the publics' opinion about farm animal welfare: indirect questioning. In survey of United States households, we find sharp differences between direct and indirect questions related to farm animal welfare. For example, whereas only 15.6% of the public said they think low meat prices are more important than the well-being of farm animals, 67.5% said the average American thinks low meat prices are more important than the well-being of farm animals. This finding, coupled with the extant literature on indirect questioning, suggests that people's concerns for farm animal welfare are actually much lower than what they say they are.

Keywords Animal welfare · Indirect questioning · Social desirability bias

1 Introduction

Self-reports of happiness, well-being, and/or health are often used in social indicators research along with measures of attitudes, goals, and/or stated intentions (e.g., Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002; Huppert et al. 2009). People often face incentives to give answers to such questions that diverge from their true subjective well-being, health, attitudes, etc. One incentive is the desire to comply with social norms and expectations. There is ample evidence that people do not honestly reveal their true opinions on issues associated with social norms (e.g., see Streb et al. 2008). For example, in the midst of an economic recession, "very happy" people might not respond in a survey that they are indeed "very happy," because such a response might be seen as inappropriate or socially unacceptable.

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