

Review

Farm Animal Welfare: the Five Freedoms and the Free Market

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Abstract

This review addresses the scientific, ethical and economic factors that impact on the welfare of farm animals. Respect for animals within the food chain is considered within the context of an ethical matrix that affords respect according to the principles of wellbeing, autonomy and justice to consumers, farm animals, farmers and the living environment. The welfare of a farm animal depends on its ability to sustain fitness and avoid suffering. The responsibility of the farmer is to make provision for good welfare through good husbandry; he cannot *ensure* good welfare. Improvements to farm animal welfare can only come about within the context of the forces that drive the free market. In essence, consumers need to afford a greater extrinsic value to farm animals. The costs to farmers of legislation to impose higher animal welfare standards are substantial but the cost to consumers can be very small. The responsibility is therefore on the consumer to convert an expressed desire for higher welfare standards into an effective demand. A promising route to encourage and fulfil this demand is through welfare-based quality assurance schemes with quality control ensured by independent audit. At present, audit protocols are based largely on identification of the elements of good husbandry. Ultimately we need a further independent audit to ensure that the outcome of these perceived elements of good husbandry is, in fact, good animal welfare.

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