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ARTICLES

Citizens' Views on Farm Animal Welfare and Related Information Provision: Exploratory Insights from Flanders, Belgium

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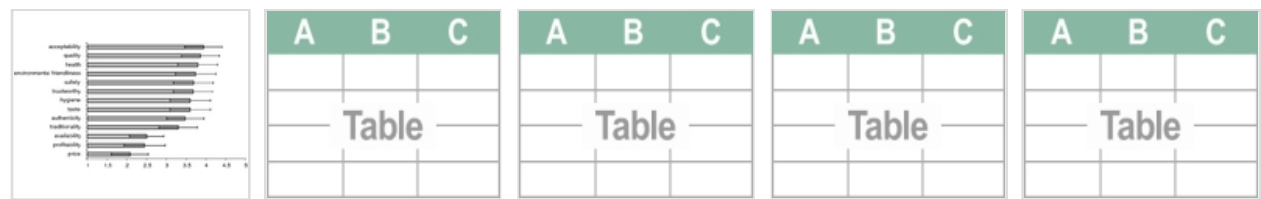
Abstract

The results of two independent empirical studies with Flemish citizens were combined to address the problem of a short fall of information provision about higher welfare products. The research objectives were (1) to improve our understanding of how citizens conceptualize farm animal welfare, (2) to analyze the variety in the claimed personal relevance of animal welfare in the food purchasing decision process, and (3) to find out people's needs in relation to product information about animal welfare and the extent to which the current information caters to these needs. The first study consisted of a survey conducted in three consecutive years (2000-2002, $n = 521$) and was complemented with more recent qualitative data from four focus group discussions (2006, $n = 29$). Citizens' conceptualization of farm animal welfare matched reasonably well with those in the scientific literature, although it is clearly influenced by a lower level of practical experience and a higher weight of empathy. In general, respondents indicated that animal welfare was an important product attribute, although it was less important than primary product attributes such as quality, health, and safety. Moral issues, rather than a perception of higher quality, were the main influence on preferences for higher welfare products. At present, higher standards of animal welfare are mostly guaranteed within more general quality assurance schemes. Yet people's decisions to not choose higher welfare products seems to be related to the perceptual disconnection between eating animal food products and the living producing animals. Respondents generally thought better information provision was required and the present level of provision was strongly criticized. In combination, the findings of both studies help inform the discussion about how citizens can be informed about animal welfare and the preferred *content, source, and medium of such information*. The paper also provides insights into citizens' semantic interpretation of the concept of animal welfare (*what wordings they use*) and the range of relevance that animal welfare has for different groups that, in turn is useful in identifying *which segments* can be targeted. This can contribute to a more effective valorization of animal welfare

as a product attribute.

Keywords Animal welfare - Conceptualization - Information - Labeling - Social attitudes

Images (more...)



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