

Title:

Consumer value conflicts surrounding ethical food purchase decisions:
a focus on animal welfare

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Abstract:

Ethical attitudes in relation to meat purchases were studied among urban and rural consumers in Scotland. All subjects perceived at least some ethical issues in relation to animal production systems, in particular, systems keeping animals in close confinement. Welfare-friendly production systems were viewed as adding value to a food, but this value was not necessarily realizable to producers if purchases occurred only when foods were on special offer. Statements made by individuals were often contradictory, revealing ambivalence, unresolved value conflicts and a general lack of involvement in the nature of meat production. A number of barriers to the establishment of stable attitudes and behaviours in relation to the ethical treatment of food animals were also identified. A key finding of the study is that individuals can hold two views on animal welfare. On the one hand, they may think as citizens influencing societal standards, and on the other, as consumers at the point of purchase. As citizens, they support the notion of animals being entitled to a good life; as meat consumers, they avoid the cognitive connection with the live animal. This paper explores both the citizen-consumer relationship and purchase strategies used by consumers to resolve value conflicts. Lessons for public and commercial policy are highlighted in the context of the Curry Report (2002) which advocates more effective market segmentation where markets are finely attuned to their customers, with the development of a number of assurance schemes discussed in the article.