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Abstract:The Curry Report (Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, Farming and Food: A Sustainable Future (Curry Report), Cabinet Office, London, 2002) recently recommended that farmers 'reconnect' with their consumers, their markets and the food chain. In terms of livestock production this process of reconnection may not be so straightforward, firstly, because of the productive paradoxes upon which livestock production is built, and secondly, because the nature of people's relationships with livestock is complex, ambiguous and dynamic. This paper uses ethnographic data to illustrate sociologically the paradoxical nature of commercial and hobby livestock production in the context of Northeast Scotland. Producers of livestock have contradictory productive roles: as empathetic carers and economic producers of 'sentient commodities'. The attitudes, feelings and behaviours of those working with livestock cannot be isolated from the position of both humans and animals in the division of labour (breeding, storing and finishing) and the socio-economic context in which commercial and hobby livestock production occurs. For example, those working with breeding animals tend to express varying degrees of emotional attachment whilst those preparing livestock for slaughter express varying degrees of emotional detachment. Any animal, however, that deviates from the routine process of production can stand out from the herd, become individually recognised, have more meaning to the worker, and thus become more than 'just an animal'. I will also draw on the work of Merton (Sociological Ambivalence and Other Essays, The Free Press, New York, 1976), Digard (Relationships between humans and domesticated animals, Interdisciplinary Science Reviews 19(3) (1994) 231) and Kopytoff (The cultural biography of things: commoditisation as process, In: A. Appadurai (Ed.), The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, pp. 64-91) to provide an emerging framework to understand the variable characteristics of people's relationships with their animals, and to account for and capture their contradictory and unstable elements.