

□□□ **ACADEMIC STUDIES WITHOUT TEARS** □□□

ACADEMIC RESEARCH FINDINGS TURNED INTO INFORMATION THAT ADVOCATES CAN GRASP AND USE EFFORTLESSLY

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Farm animal welfare: Perspectives from Latin America and Africa



Do advocates ever wonder whether *farm animal welfare* means exactly the same thing to an individual in Kenya as to someone in Kentucky in the U.S. or in Kent in the U.K.? To a global meat corporation? To a pig farmer in Brazil?

This issue of ASWT - featuring eight academic studies (three from 2021, three from 2020, one each from 2019 and 2018) - takes one on a journey across the southern part of the globe to see how farm animal welfare plays out in different settings there, from Chile to Namibia. What are their perceptions and practices with regard to farm animal welfare? How seriously do they take it?

As the authors of the paper on farmers managing intensive pig farms in Brazil write, "Animal welfare is a complex concept and, as such, researchers often dispute how to best portray the different angles involved. For the pig farmers participating in this study, it was no different."

1. Do Chileans want sick pigs to be treated with antibiotics or euthanized?

Most of the 1,780 meat-eating consumers surveyed in Chile want unhealthy pigs to be treated with antibiotics rather than euthanized on the farm. They think this is the best solution for producers to manage pigs who are ill.

Paradoxically, they do not want to consume products from pigs that have been isolated in "hospital pens" due to their poor health. They fear these pigs pose food safety concerns. Individuals involved with agriculture have a somewhat different view. They have less aversion to consuming pigs housed in "hospital pens".

Consumers also have "a low level of knowledge" regarding antibiotics as well as the connection between animal welfare and antibiotics. This lack of understanding may affect efforts to ban or reduce the use of antibiotics in livestock production in Chile.

Lemos Teixeira, Dayane, Daniel Enriquez-Hidalgo, Tamara Estay Espinoza, Fernando Bas, and Maria José Hötzel. "Meat Consumers' Opinion Regarding Unhealthy Pigs: Should They Be Treated with Antibiotics or Euthanized on Farm?" *Antibiotics* 10, no. 1 (January 9, 2021): 60. doi: 10.3390/antibiotics10010060



LONG READ ALERT! This item takes at least two minutes to read.

2. Are farmers managing Brazil's intensive pig farms to blame for the pigs' pain and misery?

For the pigs raised intensively in one of Brazil's main pig producing regions (Santa Catarina), the humans that matter most to them are the humans that preside over their day-to-day lives, that come to their housing every day. Not the activists protesting on the street, not the executives heading their firms' corporate social responsibility programs, not the donors writing out checks.

So what do these humans who see and manage the pigs every day (a.k.a. pig farmers) think of the pigs' well-being? Do they want to improve their practice for the benefit of the pigs?

It's complicated! That's the finding of the researchers who interviewed 44 pig farmers in 2019.

In the farmers' own eyes, they are not shirking their duty in caring for their pigs. They really mean it when they say, "My pigs are OK" in terms of welfare:

- They recognize that pigs are sentient beings that feel pain.
- They can identify "all the dimensions that impact the welfare of a pig on a farm" such as naturalness.
- They acknowledge that "management practices may lead to pigs' stress" and "good management could reduce the incidence of stress".

But at the same time:

- They use "painful and stressful management practices", especially in the first week of piglets' life (e.g. castration without pain control).
- They do not associate stress with ill health.
- Indicators of poor welfare are clearly present (e.g. "belly-nosing, fights, tail-biting, diarrhoea"; "environments that limit the expression of natural behaviours").

What are the reasons for this apparent contradiction, discrepancy, and dissonance?

The crux of the problem lies in how the farmers interpret animal welfare, in how their attitudes towards animal welfare are framed, influenced, and constrained by various factors and realities:

1. Farmers' views of animal welfare:

- Animal welfare is mostly explained by the farmers "in terms of biological aspects such as health and availability of drinking water and food", of avoiding disease, of "environmental aspects such as climate control and cleanliness".
- What do these farmers consider to be the most critical animal welfare issue? Diarrhea.
- What is the evidence of high animal welfare according to these farmers? The animals are more productive and perform better.
- The farmers reckon that stereotypical or abnormal behaviors are infrequent and irrelevant, and are "inherent to animal production and not a welfare concern".

2. Farmers' reactions to suggested measures proven to be effective in improving animal welfare:

- Farmers reject many of these suggestions (e.g. "offering substrate, rearing in family systems, pre-weaning socialisation and group housing for gestation"). They find these suggestions to be unacceptable and in conflict with their practical and economic realities (e.g. too laborious, too hard to manage or perform, too high a bump in production costs, too much investments "that would not be repaid").

- Rather than consider the use of higher welfare management practices to alleviate the negative impacts caused by poor welfare, farmers rely heavily on antibiotics and medication. They also prefer to turn to biosecurity procedures instead.
- It is important to note that achieving a fairly good comprehension and implementation of these suggested measures requires a degree of knowledge and technical skills that is greater than that currently possessed by the farmers (e.g. they do not always realize they cause the pigs distress; they believe neonatal diarrhea and arthritis is "momentary" and there is no need to help the pigs). They are not able to access proper information about farm animal welfare. And that could well be due to "ineffective communication between the scientific community, local advisors and farmers".

3. Farmers' opinions of industry and integrators

- Farmers working for integrators understand they need to meet specific animal welfare standards.
- Some of them are dissatisfied with the demands from integrators and retailers.
- But some farmers indicate that financial incentives from industry can be a great motivator for them to improve animal welfare.

4. Farmers' opinions of customers

- To say there is a disconnect between most of the farmers and consumers is an understatement. Farmers feel strongly and negatively about consumers.
- Farmers think consumers are "distant", "uninformed", and "uninterested in . . . how hard the lives of farmers can be". They are frustrated at consumers' unrealistic expectations.
- "Still, a portion of farmers recognised that some consumers are interested in animal welfare and that this is an important segment to be considered."

Should these farmers shoulder all the blame for the pigs' pain and misery? Should they be admonished and told to go do a better job? Should one not listen to their side of the story, try to understand the realities they have to contend with, and address the underlying complexities that shape their perspectives? These farmers report that they live "a stressful life", that they feel they are "at the mercy of 'irrational, greedy or selfish consumers', demanding companies and unfair rules".

Perhaps one should acknowledge that "economic, technical and social factors restrict farmers' autonomy and their ability to perform their role as stewards of animal welfare."

A lot more info:

- "Although we identified many management and animal indicators of poor welfare (e.g., use of painful and stressful management practices and use of environments that limit the expression of natural behaviours), most farmers were satisfied with animal welfare standards at their farms. They saw no justification for further investments to improve it. These perceptions are aligned with the farmers' understanding of animal welfare, mostly comprising good biological functioning. Likewise, any changes they would consider making to improve animal welfare were related to productivity, such as biosecurity, climate comfort and infrastructure and many explained their perception that improving pig welfare is costly."
- ". . . developing new practices that improve animal welfare is not enough to change the status quo, as innovations often fail to address the farmers' perceived constraints, especially those of an economic nature. Listening to these key stakeholders is thus essential to help formulate and enact sustainable policies aimed at improving animal health and animal welfare."
- "Although mistreatment was identified as detrimental to the welfare of pigs, some hinted that it is not always possible to avoid it. . . . Some farmers associated the welfare of pigs with free-range systems and freedom to express the species' specific behaviours, but not as a real possibility. . . . Of the farmers who associated animal welfare improvements with better infrastructure, 21% talked about adding air conditioning, and 25% about building new or bigger facilities to reduce stocking density in the growing and finishing phases."
- "Although all participants believed that pigs are capable of feeling pain, they did not mention any intentions to control pain during management procedures. Like Canadian farmers, the farmers in this study considered their practices to be acceptable, necessary, or the pain unimportant. Thus, farmers were sympathetic to the pain of the animals but did not show empathy, in that they did not try to avoid or minimise the pain. . . . Lack of empathy was also demonstrated in the normalisation or desensitisation towards stereotyped behaviours in the pigs. . . . In our study, farmers showed an explicit contradiction between their beliefs and behaviours regarding the suffering of pigs and their motivation to adopt changes

to reduce it. Although some study participants described feelings of discomfort about performing painful practices, this was not disruptive enough to counter behaviour traditionally established in the community."

- "Some farmers referred to animal welfare as part of a technological package imposed by the industry, and not necessarily legitimate. One example discussed by several farmers was group gestation housing, which many considered unnecessary or even detrimental for the sows' welfare, given the increased risk of fighting leading to sows' stress, a concern also raised by some Canadian farmers. Farmers in many countries consider costs and investments as the main deterrents to implementing improvements in animal welfare on their farms (Brazil; Germany; China; The Netherlands; Hungary.)"

Albernaz-Gonçalves, R., G. Olmos, and M.J. Hötzel. "My Pigs Are Ok, Why Change? – Animal Welfare Accounts of Pig Farmers." *Animal* 15, no. 3 (2021): 100154. doi: 10.1016/j.animal.2020.100154

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3. Even "skeptics" in Mexico are willing to pay more for higher animal welfare products

Mexicans care about farm animal welfare!

"Skeptics" is the lowest tier in a three-tier customer profiling system used by academic researchers to segment customers based on their perceptions and attitudes towards animal welfare.

The three segments are: "Ethical"; "Concerned"; "Skeptical".

- "Skeptical": Persons in this group score lowest on whether farm animals feel pain and should be free of fear and stress. They also do not want more information or market mechanisms to promote farm animal welfare.
- "Concerned": They are primarily interested in economic and commercial factors (e.g. farmers should be compensated for animal welfare improvements, consumers should change retail stores in order to acquire products with high animal welfare). They would like to see consumer products carry more information about farm animal welfare.
- "Ethical": They are sensitive to the pain and suffering of farm animals and the conditions in farms. They call for product labels to provide information about how farm animals are raised and their welfare. They are also in favor of new regulations to improve animal welfare (e.g. new laws to "avoid abuse during handling on the farm", teach animal welfare in primary school).

The fact that 55% of all respondents of the survey fall into the "ethical" category is strong evidence that Mexicans are concerned about the welfare of farm animals.

Even for the 30% who are "skeptics", a little over half of them are willing to pay more for higher animal welfare. (Perhaps their skepticism has more to do with "poor communication and a lack of confidence in the government and/or the Mexican food industry" rather than entrenched negative views of animal welfare itself.)

A bit more info:

- "A final interesting question for future research concerns the transition of consumers from one segment to another. The profiles of skeptical, concerned, and ethical consumers suggest that consumers may move in certain directions: from skeptical to concerned, and from concerned to ethical."
- ". . . we need to develop a reliable and effective labeling system to properly inform consumers about welfare conditions at the farm level. This system should be accompanied by a system to compensate producers who invest resources in raising animals under improved welfare and environmental conditions. At the same time, education and training programs should include aspects of AW with proper informative campaigns using powerful marketing tools to create an educated and well-informed public who will buy products consistent with their values. All of these efforts will require third-party certification to avoid incorrect labeling that frustrates consumer expectations."

Miranda-de la Lama, Genaro C., Laura X. Estévez-Moreno, Morris Villarroel, Adolfo A. Rayas-Amor, Gustavo A. María, and Wilmer S. Sepúlveda. "Consumer Attitudes Toward Animal Welfare-Friendly Products and Willingness to Pay: Exploration of Mexican Market Segments." *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 22, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 13–25. doi: 10.1080/10888705.2018.1456925



4. You don't want to be a sheep or goat that's taken to a large abattoir in Ethiopia

If you were a farmed sheep or goat in central Ethiopia and had the misfortune of being brought to a large abattoir there, you would almost certainly be beaten by the handlers. (Beatings occurred 87.7% of the time when researchers did a study of 192 sheep, 192 goats, and 57 animal handlers in that abattoir in 2014). And you would have a fifty-fifty chance of being pushed or pulled.

Your wool/hair may be dirty (54.9% of the animals experience that). And it is possible that you have poor body condition (15.8%) and respiratory disorders (14.0%).

Trained observers will see that you occasionally reverse direction, pant, or refuse to move.

Bekele, Tizeta, Barbara Szonyi, Aklilu Feleke, and Delia Grace. "Assessment of Small Ruminant Welfare in Ethiopia – An Abattoir-Based Study." *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 23, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 356–365. doi: 10.1080/10888705.2019.1663736



5. Are consumers in Nairobi willing to pay more for higher welfare chickens?

200 randomly chosen consumers of chickens in Nairobi said they were willing to pay:

- 236% more for chickens without growth hormones
- 135% more for humane slaughter
- 72% more for animal welfare labeling
- 30% more for certified transport

"Certified transport" refers to the "use of spacious and well-ventilated trucks or vehicles that are fitted with comfortable feeding facilities and chicken are carried in upright position". The mode of transporting chickens is a special cause for concern in Kenya.

These same consumers said they wish they could pay 40% less for the confined chickens which they purchase regularly.

The "40% less" figure requires some explanation. Local context is of supreme importance here.

Nairobi's unique by-laws prohibiting free movement of chickens in public places plays a significant role in influencing customers' views. Buying live chickens from free range farms can result in having to pay penalty. So customers prefer confined chickens. And they would like the price of such chickens to come down.

A bit more info:

- "In Kenya, over two-thirds of households keep chicken and chicken meat is a key delicacy to most consumers. Total chicken production is about 40 million birds; 60% kept in semi-free range systems while the rest are in confined production systems. However . . . transportation and slaughter is fraught with inhumane practices. At the production level, the pressure to earn more profits through intensification has led to confinement of chicken in overcrowded cages and even use of certain potentially harmful chemicals such as growth stimulants/hormones in order to expedite attainment of market weights. . . . Further, it is not uncommon in Kenya to observe chicken being transported in non-designated and/or poorly designed modes such as on top of passenger vehicles or tied upside down on moving bicycles or motorcycles for many hours over long distances. Very cruel methods including twisting of the neck, dipping live chicken in boiling water or plucking feathers of live chicken are used to slaughter them."

Otieno, David Jakinda, and Sylvester Ochieng' Ogotu. "Consumer Willingness to Pay for Chicken Welfare Attributes in Kenya." *Journal of International Food & Agribusiness Marketing* 32, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 379–402. doi: 10.1080/08974438.2019.1673275



6. Which Namibia beef farming system has higher animal welfare: Traditional or commercial?

Namibia farms beef cattle under extensive, rain-fed, semi-arid condition, with three systems:

1. Village farms (communally owned, subsistence based, labor intensive, use traditional customs, have to deal with water management challenges).
2. Semi-commercial farms (communally owned, use similar practices as village farms, but those with access to overseas market and allowed to export manage their herds somewhat differently to comply with international standards).
3. Commercial farms (privately owned, cattle raised for high-value exports and graze behind fences, managed for maximum profitability and productivity).

How do these farming methods stack up when measured with New Zealand's farm animal welfare protocol and thresholds? *Welfare status is best in commercial herds*. Semi-commercial farms are second, and communal farms last; both receive "acceptable" welfare grades only in a few thresholds.

All three systems can benefit from following welfare assessment protocols developed in industrialized countries that export beef cattle. This recommendation is timely as Namibia is currently revising its animal welfare legislation.

Agostinho, Kaurivi, Yolande Baby, Richard Laven, Tim Parkinson, Rebecca Hickson, and Kevin Stafford. "Assessing Extensive Semi-Arid Rangeland Beef Cow-Calf Welfare in Namibia." "Part 1: Comparison between Farm Production System's Effect on the Welfare of Beef Cows." *Animals* 11, no. 1 (January 12, 2021): 165. doi: 2076-2615/11/1/165. "Part 2: Categorisation and Scoring of Welfare Assessment Measures." *Animals* 11, no. 2 (February 2021): 250. doi: 2076-2615/11/2/250.



7. Researchers in Africa say, "in the African community, the concept of animal welfare has not been fully embraced"

There is very little research of farm animal welfare in the context of African communities and practices. The available evidence does not paint a positive picture. For example, "poor AW indicators in Kenya include neglect; overworking; malicious physical injury; starvation; confinement; inappropriate transportation and slaughter facilities; inhumane treatment and handling at slaughter."

So what is standing in the way of African farmers embracing the same animal welfare standards as those adopted in high-income countries?

Are these barriers due to the farmers' personalities and temperaments? Researchers think not. Instead they point to "traditional customs and beliefs", "cultural norms and practices", "socio-economic status", "a lack of knowledge in animal handling and sub-standard handling facilities", "inadequate information dissemination strategies, as well as the lack of proper monitoring tools".

Communal farmers in rural and remote areas are especially in need of assistance in animal welfare matters. There is a huge number of these smallholder farmers and pastoralists. Neither the government nor animal welfare organizations (which only operate in urban areas) offer them support.

Njisane, Yonela Zifikile, Felicitas Esnart Mukumbo, and Voster Muchenje. "An Outlook on Livestock Welfare Conditions in African Communities — A Review." *Asian-Australasian Journal of Animal Sciences* 33, no. 6 (June 1, 2020): 867-878. doi: 10.5713/ajas.19.0282



8. What do global meat corporations mean when they talk about animal welfare?

There is animal welfare (according to global meat corporations) and there is animal welfare (according to animal advocacy organizations).

This is not just a matter of semantics or splitting hairs. These two groups do not use the term and concept of animal welfare to refer to exactly the same things.

The differences are revealed in a mapping exercise. Two academic researchers in Brazil looked at the 80 large, global (i.e. operating in at least two countries) corporations involved with animal-derived food listed in the Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare (BBFAW) ranking. They wanted to see if programs and policies on animal welfare are mentioned in these companies' corporate sustainability reports and websites. They also reviewed information of 13 animal welfare NGOs.

More significantly, they wanted to pin down specific animal welfare issues and topics mentioned by both the corporations and NGOs (e.g. antibiotics/hormones; diet; mutilations; cull cow/male chick/slaughter; natural light; transport).

58 out of 80 corporations (73%) mention animal welfare. 11 out of 13 NGOs (85%) address farm animal welfare in their websites. But when corporations refer to farm animal welfare issues, "the issues do not appear to be the same or have the same relevance as those addressed by . . . NGOs".

So what are the key takeaways?

First, animal welfare should not be regarded as a single, self-evident phenomenon or condition understood universally as the same thing by everyone. It is critically important to articulate clearly what one means by "animal welfare", especially when corporations are concerned.

Second, "NGOs could adopt positions more favorable to cooperation and transparency, making it clear what they are looking for from companies along the value chain and establishing priorities within FAW [farm animal welfare]."

Third, government agencies such as Ministério da Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento (MAPA) in Brazil and the USDA "could work together to create universal standards and expectations".

A bit more info:

Table 3 Rankings of FAW subjects by NGOs and companies based on NGO websites and company annual and sustainability reports

Note from Tiny Beam Fund: Only the top five are shown below.

Subject	Ranking by NGOs	Ranking by companies (reports)
Breeding	5	11
Cage-Free Eggs	2	3
Compliance/Monitoring	11	1
Free Range/Pasture/Space	1	5
Gestation Crates	4	4
Slaughter	3	2

Hoag, Thomas Michael, and Celso Funcia Lemme. "Alimentos de origen animal: Riesgos y oportunidades para la industria debido a las políticas de bienestar de los animales /Animal-Derived Food Industry: Risks and Opportunities Due to Farm Animal Welfare." *Revista de Administração de Empresas* 58, no. 3 (2018): 244-253. doi: 10.1590/s0034-759020180305

EXPLANATORY NOTE:

- Academic studies are notoriously hard to find, read, and put into practical use by non-academics.
- Super-busy advocates cannot afford to spend a lot of time and effort to dig up, digest, and deploy academic research even though they recognize the value of academic studies in informing and improving their advocacy work.
- *Academic Studies Without Tears* aims to help advocates faced with this dilemma.
- Its target audience are leaders and funders of non-profit advocacy organizations addressing the many negative impacts of industrial animal agriculture in low- and middle-income countries.
- It uses a communication style – reminiscent of quiz or news items – that makes everything a breeze to read.
- Each issue focuses on a particular topic and includes 8 – 10 academic studies.
- It goes without saying that the academic studies featured are *not* the final word. They have flaws and limitations. They are just a tiny selection of perspectives and findings for advocates to consider, to whet their appetite. But every relevant data point and nugget of cogent information adds to one’s store of knowledge and has the potential to spark new ideas.

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