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# Ethical motivations (consumers) of animal welfare and the interest for farmers

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I consider J. Webster as a “moderate” animalist, but I do not know if he agrees with such definition; anyhow, I think he is, with D. Broom, one of major scientists of farm animal welfare. For these reasons I like to recall the start of “Introduction: Man’s Dominion” to his book “Animal welfare (a cool eye towards Eden): “Man has dominion over the animals whether we like it or not. Wherever we share space on the planet, and this includes all but the most inaccessible regions of land, sea and air, it is we, no they that determine where and how they will live. We may elect to put hens in a battery cage or establish a game reserve to preserve the tiger but in each case the decision is ours, no theirs. We make a pet of the hamster but poison the rat. These are very human decision but they have much in common with decisions taken by other animals, since they reflect our own will to survive, preserve our genetic inheritance and enrich the quality of our lives. We need good food and battery eggs are nutritious an cheap. We need good hygiene, and fear that rats carry germs. Pets enrich our lives and those of our children. We admire the tiger not only for its fearful symmetry but as a symbol of freedom itself, so we offer it rather more freedom than we would think fit for the chicken. It is impossible, however, to avoid the issue that both the chicken and the tiger are living on our terms” (Webster, 1994).

Can this be interpreted as a denial of animal welfare? I do not think so; he in fact concluded the Preface of the same book as follow: “My aim, I repeat, is to offer constructive solutions to the problem of man’s dominion over the animals. These solutions will not be achieved by self-indulgent moralizing on the nature of animal rights but by practical approaches designed to reconcile our aspirations for those animals within our dominion with a proper concern for their welfare. I do not expect to achieve paradise but I do my best to be fair” (Webster, 1994).

This clearly means that our approach to the welfare issue must consider several aspects, besides the animal “happiness”, and these include different value of men and animals, the human needs for animal derived foods, the farm economical sustainability etc.. Therefore, if man has been created “in the image and likeness of God” as suggested by Bible, man has duties versus animals which rights are subordinated to the human’s ones (Warren, 1983; cited by Pascalev, 2006). In other words, as suggested above by Webster, man is responsible of a fair breeding situation where animals:

- do not suffer hunger, thirst, heat, cold, exhaustion, pain, malaise and fear;
- enjoy pleasure of delight feeds, of luxury and of optimal fitness for comfortable environment.

Nevertheless, these feelings that can be included in the 5 freedoms of Brambell’s report and afterwards of FAWC (1993), cannot be totally and contemporary fulfilled, again accor-

ding to Webster (1994). Therefore the level of welfare, in a range within good and bad, can change and needs that scientists and philosophers provide the empirical information for a precise definition of animal welfare and the ethical reflections for the establishment of general rules to obtain it. A further effort is then needed:

- from scientists and philosophers who would recognize the real perception that animals have of their own welfare and finally try to educate the public to achieve a perception of welfare that is as close as possible to that of the animals themselves (Webster, 1994);
- from scientists who would demonstrate these conditions which cause positive and negative consequences on welfare, and how such conditions occur in the different breeding systems and with varying levels of proper management;
- finally, still from scientists who would suggest the best methods to objectively evaluate welfare, after its reliable definition (in cooperation with philosophers).

Before the new research approach, the ASPA's scientists of the commission "Criteria and methods for the assessment of animal welfare" have carried out a wide reviewing of the available knowledge to complete their opinion on the following major topics:

- definition and consumer's perception of animal welfare (2 chapters);
- causes of animal welfare reduction and its consequences in the major animal species (13 chapters);
- animal welfare evaluation (7 chapters).

The issue – now published by Italian Journal Animal Science (2009), Suppl. 1 – , is moreover enriched with the EFSA's opinions on the topic of animal welfare.

Besides the fair definition of animal welfare by Carenzi and Verga (2009) "the most widely definition of animal welfare should comprehend the whole state of the organisms, considering together body and mind and their links", a plenty of information can be obtained with concern to the factors of different welfare conditions occurring in intensive and extensive breeding systems of the major farm animals (including the transport and slaughtering). Moreover, the behavioural, physiological and pathological consequences to acute and chronic stresses have been deepened and the derived indicators, associate to the performance ones, have been utilized as "animal based parameters" for welfare evaluation. These direct indices of welfare, together the indirect ones (life and feeding conditions), are been utilized for some research and field models of animal welfare evaluation have been proposed. Finally, some attempts for evaluation of positive animal welfare (contentedness) have been showed.

Of great interest is for us the general consensus toward the reciprocal interest of either consumers and farmers for a good welfare of farm animals which would be economically sustainable, as previously suggested by Webster (1994) too. This is sometime considered as contradictory, but according to McInerney (1991), cited by Newman (1994) and more recently by Appleby (2005), the relationship between productivity and welfare is complex: in the first step, both are raised, while much later, both are reduced (a proper approach is therefore important). A good example of a contemporary improvement has been given in some commercial farms where high genetic merit cows, if properly managed, that means without excessive exploitation, had a welfare improvement – as wished by consumers – and "consequently" they showed an increase of both milk yield and fertility (Trevisi *et al.*, 2006; Calamari *et al.*, 2003) as wished by the farmers. It is then important to underline that a good compromise is needed because an excess of animal welfare means a reduction of farmer welfare (Dantzer, 2001), but good welfare improves animal efficiency.

In conclusion, the right approach to this topic would be primarily to help farmers to improve the welfare conditions of their animals. In other words, the monitoring of animal welfare would be “pro-active” and based on the persuasion of herdsman and the prevention of problems as suggested by the Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals (Commission of the European Community, 2006) and not only for animal transportation. “Research should increasingly focus on the development of monitoring systems for the implementation of animal welfare requirements in order to make the official controls performed more efficient and proactive, in particular, the control of animal welfare conditions during transport should be based on prevention ...”. This is what we want for a more general and satisfactory approach to the animal welfare issue in the Italian farms. However, because any breeding system can fully satisfy all the animal needs and therefore ensure a full welfare, a great effort is also needed to define its acceptability, which must be agreed by stakeholders and farmers. For this, of primary importance is the objective evaluation of welfare that must be based on life conditions (housing) and maybe more on the animal response to them with indices of physical and mental welfare (physiological, health, performance and behaviour).

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