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Farm animal welfare, responsible business & the role of big brands: the politics of sight

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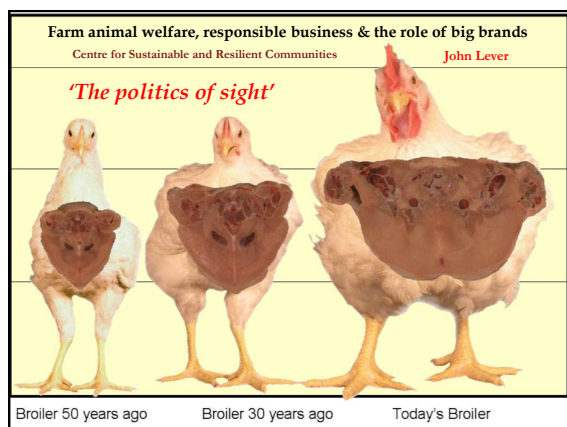
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Outline of my talk

- ✦ Why FAW?
- ✦ Consumer concerns & FAW
- ✦ The business case for FAW
- ✦ FAW and Sustainability
- ✦ FAW and Sustainability in BBFAW
- ✦ FAW and the 'politics of sight'

Welfare Quality
Science and society improving animal welfare

Science
improving animal welfare

Animal welfare is of considerable importance, not only determined by the overall nature and welfare status of the animals from which the products are derived, but also because animal welfare can positively affect product quality, bearing on food quality and safety.

The WELFARE QUALITY® project is about addressing the growing public concern to improved welfare of farm animals, taking into account social concerns and market demands, to develop practical, science-based information systems, and practical specifications for WELFARE QUALITY® will make significant contributions to the welfare of farm animals.

Forty-four institutes and universities (representing Europe and American countries) with specialist expertise in animal welfare joined the project started May 2004 and will take full responsibility for the project.

Assessment protocol for poultry

Welfare Quality®
NEN

Publications

- ✦ **Lever, J. and Evans, A. (2016)**
Corporate social responsibility and farm animal welfare: towards sustainable development in the food industry? ... in Stages of Corporate Social Responsibility: From Ideas to Impacts, London, UK: Springer.
- ✦ **Miele, M. and Lever, J. (2014)**
Improving Animal Welfare in Europe: Cases of Comparative Bio-sustainability, in *Sustainable Food Systems: Building a New Paradigm*, London, UK: Routledge, pp. 143-165.
- ✦ **Bergeaud-Blackler, F., Fischer, J. and Lever, J. (2015)**
Halal Matters: Islam, politics and markets in global perspective, London, UK: Routledge.
- ✦ **Miele, M. and Lever, J. (2013)**
Civilizing the market for welfare friendly products in Europe? The techno-ethics of the Welfare Quality® assessment, in *Geoforum*, 48, pp. 63-72.
- ✦ **Lever, J. and Miele, M. (2012)**
The growth of Halal meat markets in Europe: an exploration of the supply side theory of religion, *The Journal of Rural Studies*, 28 (4), pp. 528-537, ISSN 0743-0167.

Why Farm Animal Welfare (FAW)?

- ✦ Contemporary public concerns about FAW began to increase after the publication of Ruth Harrison's (1964) book *Animal Machines* in the early 1960s.
- ✦ In recent decades, increasing public anxiety over animal farming epidemics (BSE, FMD and Avian Flu) has reinforced consumer concern for food safety and the welfare of farmed animals. (Miele and Lever 2014; Lever and Evans 2016)

The outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the UK in 2001 caused a crisis in British agriculture and tourism costing the economy £1,000,000s.

Foot and Mouth Heart and Soul
A collection of personal accounts of the foot and mouth outbreak in Great Britain 2001
Compiled and Edited by Sir Gordon Milne
Routledge

The tourism industry in the Lake District and many other places was badly hit as areas were closed off to stop the spread of the disease

Consumer concerns & FAW

- As consumer concerns have continued to grow many food companies and corporate retailers have started to address FAW in their corporate social responsibility strategies (Lever and Evans 2016)
- Within the new markets for FAW friendly products that have emerged improving FAW has often been presented as having mutually beneficial outcomes for food businesses, NGOs and consumers! (Miele and Lever 2013)

ANIMAL WELFARE

Corporate Social Responsibility & Animal Welfare

Our animal welfare mission statement...

By better production practices we build and maintain the highest product and operational standards and ensure the highest welfare standards for every animal (FAW and growing) and to be able to demonstrate our commitment to our animal welfare and welfare objectives.

SUSTAINABILITY Animal Care

Raising healthy animals

Our primary aim as a company is to raise healthy animals. Our animal care management program, which guides the care of our animals in every stage of their lives, provides their safety and overall wellbeing from production to processing.

Waitrose has a long history of industry leadership in responsible animal production. Our comprehensive, systematic animal care management program, established more than a decade ago and refined and updated over time, ensures that our animals are raised in the best possible conditions on our farms. All our employees and contract producers must employ the methods and behaviors of the management program, and we are able to verify that compliance. Read more about Waitrose's animal care program www.waitrose.com/animal-welfare

Animal welfare at Waitrose

- Freedom from hunger and thirst** – by providing enough fresh water and the right type and amount of food to keep them fit.
- Freedom from discomfort** – by making sure that animals have the right type of environment including shelter and somewhere comfortable to rest.
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease** – by preventing them from getting ill or injured and by making sure animals are diagnosed and treated rapidly if they do.
- Freedom to express normal behaviour** – by making sure animals have enough space, proper facilities and the company of other animals of their own kind.
- Freedom from fear and distress** – by making sure their conditions and treatment avoid mental suffering.

FREEDOM FOOD
RSPCA MONITORED

The business case for FAW

- Large retailers and corporate actors use FAW to protect their brand by ensuring the integrity of their products, differentiating product ranges & communicating this to consumers (Miele and Lever 2013; Lever and Evans 2016)
- The business case for FAW has thus grown considerably and this has led to the emergence of the Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare (BBFAW) (www.bbfa.com)

BBFAW
Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare

Every year, nearly 70 billion animals are farmed for food

Designed to drive higher FAW standards in the world's leading food companies, the overarching aim of BBFAW is to provide investors and other interested stakeholders with information to help them to understand the business implications of FAW.

The benchmark uses material available in CSR reports and on company websites to evaluate the performance of global food companies against a set of FAW criteria, whilst asking questions about management commitment, governance, and management, leadership and innovation, and performance reporting.

Investors

Farm animal welfare is a systemic risk that many companies in the food industry are either not effectively managing or not properly reporting. The Business Benchmark provides a robust assessment of company practice and reporting on farm animal welfare and is designed to help investors to integrate farm animal welfare into their investment research and decision-making.

Food Companies

Animal welfare is becoming an increasingly important topic for consumers, alongside issues related to food provenance, traceability and quality. The Business Benchmark provides companies with a clear set of expectations on farm animal welfare management practice and reporting, enabling them to benchmark themselves against industry peers and to progressively drive up welfare standards in their supply chains.

→ BUSINESS MANAGEMENT/INNOVATION → ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN STUDIES → ECO-BUSINESS

Eco-Business

A Big-Brand Takeover of Sustainability

By Peter Dauvergne and Jane Lister

Overview

McDonald's promises to use only beef, coffee, fish, chicken, and cooking oil obtained from sustainable sources. Coca-Cola promises to achieve water neutrality. Unilever seeks to achieve 100 percent sustainable agricultural sourcing by 2020. Walmart has pledged to become carbon neutral. Big-brand companies seem to be making commitments that go beyond the usual "greenwashing" efforts undertaken largely for public-relations purposes. In *Eco-Business*, Peter Dauvergne and Jane Lister examine this new corporate embrace of sustainability, its actual accomplishments, and the consequences for the environment.

For many leading-brand companies, these corporate sustainability efforts go deep, reorienting central operations and extending through global supply chains. Yet, as Dauvergne and Lister point out, these companies are doing this not for the good of the planet but for their own profits and market share in a volatile, globalized economy. They are using sustainability as a business tool. Dauvergne and Lister show that the eco-efficiencies achieved by big-brand companies limit the potential for finding deeper solutions to pressing environmental problems and reinforce runaway consumption. Eco-business promotes the sustainability of big business, not the sustainability of life on Earth.

Buying Options

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I knew that FAW is linked to sustainability in many different ways and I was intrigued to know why it wasn't considered in this context...

FAW and Sustainability

- ✦ Just as it's argued that big brand companies engage very narrowly with sustainability to pursue growth and profits at the expense of environmental sustainability (Dauvergne and Lister 2013), in this paper I argue that many global food companies engage very narrowly with FAW!
- ✦ **What's the evidence for this?**
- ✦ Research I've been involved shows that many consumers link FAW to a broad range of ethical and environmental issues linked to health, wellbeing, food safety and food quality (www.welfarequality.net)
- ✦ But this was not evident amongst companies in BBFAW!

FAW and Sustainability in BBFAW

- ✦ In 2014 BBFAW (Amos and Sullivan 2014) found that many companies do not provide regular updates on FAW practice and performance in the same way that they do for other sustainability issues such as climate change
- ✦ A year later (Amos and Sullivan 2015) it was reported that many companies report randomly on FAW, do not see links with wider sustainability agendas and have no understanding of why they are engaging with FAW!
- ✦ While some companies discuss issues such as 'food sustainability', BBFAW found that many are not clear 'about whether or how FAW fits into this wider discourse (Amos and Sullivan 2015).

The 'politics of sight'

- ✦ Research over a number of years has shown that there is a strong tension between meat eating and FAW - **while consumers care about FAW issues, many disassociate meat from its animal origins to assuage their conscience and moral anxieties about meat eating** (Harper and Henson 2001; Onwezem and Weele 2016)
- ✦ The meat industry currently goes to great lengths to keep distasteful practices hidden from view and it is now illegal in some US states to record and make visible what takes place in slaughterhouses (Pachirat 2011).
- ✦ The relationship between 'power' and 'sight' is a central aspect of Elias's (1939 [2012]) work on *The Process of Civilization* - where he argues that the emergence of distance between morally repugnant practices and the sanitized realm of everyday life holds a central place in 'civilized' societies.

The 'politics of sight'

- ✦ As we become more 'civilized', Elias (2012) argues that we push things that 'offend' us behind the scenes of everyday life into the collective unconscious!
- ✦ Take for example, the issue of animal slaughter.
- ✦ During the 18th century, slaughter was an everyday sight on urban streets. Over the last 250 years, however, the practice of slaughter has slowly disappeared from view.
- ✦ Large public abattoirs replaced small private slaughterhouses on city streets, before they too were pushed out to the urban fringe where they could no longer offend 'civilized sensibilities' (see also Otter 2008; Vialles 1994).

The Structural Invisibility of Outsiders: The Role of Migrant Labour in the Meat-Processing Industry

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Sociology
1-17
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Abstract

This article examines the role of migrant workers in meat-processing factories in the UK. Drawing on materials from mixed methods research in a number of case study towns across Wales, we explore the structural and spatial processes that position migrant workers as outsiders. While state policy and immigration controls are often presented as a way of protecting migrant workers from work-based exploitation and ensuring jobs for British workers, our research highlights that the situation 'on the ground' is more complex. We argue that 'self-exploitation' among the migrant workforce is linked to the strategies of employers and the organisation of work, and that hyper-flexible work patterns have reinforced the spatial and social invisibilities of migrant workers in this sector. While this creates problems for migrant workers, we conclude that it is beneficial to supermarkets looking to supply consumers with the regular supply of cheap food to which they have become accustomed.

Keywords

civilising process, invisibility, liminality, meat processing, migrant workers, outsiders, Wales

FAW & the 'politics of sight'

- ✦ As I've indicated already, many consumers link FAW to a broad range of ethical and environmental issues!
- ✦ Research suggests that the cognitive dissonance experienced by meat eaters can be mitigated by focusing on the more **humane** aspects of animal production (Bray et al 2016)
- ✦ Research also finds that the complexity of the issues involved means that consumers rarely make links between meat eating and issues such as climate change (Cole et al 2009)

Implications of the 'politics of sight'

- ✦ The political implications of the 'politics of sight' have not yet been fully realized (Pachirat 2011) and I argue that the continuing consumer distancing from the realities of industrial livestock production through responsible FAW management is problematic for environmental sustainability.
- ✦ While some food companies now provide more information on FAW than they once (e.g. free range eggs and chickens), from reading BBFAW reports it seems clear that the more troubling aspects of FAW and meat production remain largely hidden from view!
- ✦ The spectacular rise in the number of animals slaughtered globally in the half century since FAW first became a public concern in the early 1940s (Harrison 1964) illustrates both the scale of this expansion and the problem at hand (Weis 2013).

E. Sustainability & the 'politics of sight'

- ✦ Only 8 Billion animals were slaughtered for food globally in 1961, yet by 2010 this figure had reached 64 billion!
- ✦ This is expected to rise to 120 billion by 2050, and most of these animals will be raised under intensive systems of production with poor FAW! (Weis 2013)
- ✦ During the same period (1961-2010) greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from global beef cattle, chicken and pork production increased by 59%, 89% and 461% respectively (Caro et al 2016).
- ✦ While we need to reduce GHG emissions this is no easy task. In some production systems reductions can be achieved by improving FAW, while in other cases the reverse is true!

Conclusions

- ✦ My conclusion is that the 'politics of sight' restricts consumer understanding of the links between FAW and environmental sustainability.
- ✦ And that this gives global food companies the space to pursue **responsible FAW management** without raising consumer concerns to a point at which it will impact sales and profits!
- ✦ But public pressure to address GHG emissions is increasing and global food companies need to start discussing and considering these issues if we are to address environmental sustainability.

