

Bioethics Symposium I: The Hunger Games: Should “Big Ag” Be Left Standing?

44 “Valuing” alternative agricultural systems: What do consumers perceive about different labels and where do they get their information? N. J. O. Widmar*, C. Croney, and M. G. S. McKendree, *Purdue University, W. Lafayette, IN.*

Consumers today are interested in not only what they buy, but how it was made and who/what was affected. What are consumer’s preferences surrounding attributes such as organic, animal-friendly and all-natural? Who do consumers trust for information on socially-relevant agriculture debates, such as animal welfare? Consumer’s tastes, preferences, and values are highly variable and heterogeneous. Determining which agricultural system is ethically superior to another is complicated, especially without consensus on what makes a production method or system “good.” Even consumers’ interpretations of simple labels such as all-natural vary widely; survey respondents report that they associate such labels with improved animal welfare practices, no antibiotics, no hormones, no preservatives added, improved taste and improved food safety. As labels such as “all-natural” appear, it is important for producers to understand what they are perceived to mean, and how and to what extent purchasing them aligns with a consumer’s values. For example, does such a label suggest improved welfare or a food safety enhancement? Along with perceptions, the consumer’s knowledge base, information sources, and past experiences may also influence their demand for alternative practices. Consumers asked where they seek animal welfare information relied on HSUS and PETA, and to a lesser extent, federal government agencies and “other.” More recently, when asked this question with the option to select not having any source for animal welfare information, the majority (55%) selected no source. As debates continue about what animal agriculture should look like, it is important to recognize that deficits of trusted sources of objective information, combined with underlying value notions may explain why consumers’ purchasing behavior may or may not reflect their stated preferences. Understanding the value that consumers place on various systems and their attributes and the basis for forming their opinions enables constructive discussion surrounding how agricultural industries can meet consumers’ demands, and do so profitably.

Key Words: consumer demand, preference

45 Farm size and animal welfare. D. M. Weary* and M. A. G. von Keyserlingk, *Animal Welfare Program, Faculty of Land and Food Systems, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada.*

Concerns about the welfare of farm animals often revolve around the issue of farm size. Many critics suggest that animals on larger farms are less likely to receive individual attention and instead are treated only as units of production, and that the shift to larger farms results in a decline in standards of care and ultimately in the quality of life for animals. In this talk we outline the historical background of this criticism, drawing parallels with the earlier debate over the shift from an agrarian to an industrial society. We also argue that farm size influences different aspects of animal welfare in different ways. For example, larger farms may permit more specialized and professional management of animal health, but make it difficult to provide access to pasture for dairy cows. We also review the limited empirical literature linking farm size and welfare and conclude that available research provides little support for any simple relationship. In conclusion, increases in farm size provide opportunities to improve the welfare of farm animals but also create welfare risks. Policy and advocacy efforts, instead of trying to reverse

the increase in farm size, would be better directed toward generalizing the welfare benefits and minimizing the risks.

Key Words: natural living, professionalism, industrial agriculture

46 Can the fox guard the hen house? Can big corporations be socially responsible? T. Grandin*, *Colorado State University, Fort Collins.*

Three factors make big food corporations socially responsible. They are the (1) top leader’s ethical principles, (2) a health emergency, and (3) activists that expose serious problems. During a 40-year career working with big corporations, I have observed animal welfare switching from an abstract nuisance that is delegated to the legal or public relations department to a real issue. This occurred when top executives went on tours of farms and slaughter plants. They saw reality; many things were acceptable but there were bad practices that needed changing. Since 1999, there have been huge improvements in animal handling in large slaughter plants. The improvement started when big restaurant chains started auditing animal welfare. Activist pressure was an initial stimulus, but the long-term motivator was top executives getting their “eyes opened.” Industry organizations responded by developing guidelines and I have served on many committees. Sometimes the worst producers get on the committees to weaken standards. Large corporations can be socially responsible but many of them will need some outside pressure to prevent the worst abuses. On the other hand, big corporations are not the evil empire depicted by activists. Reality is always somewhere in the middle.

Key Words: animal welfare, social responsibility, welfare standard

47 Bioethical implications of retailer decisions and agreements with activists: HSUS-UEP Agreement. J. C. Swanson*, *Michigan State University, East Lansing*

The objective of this talk is to examine the ethical challenges that have occurred through activist pressure on food retailers, use of state initiatives, and industry-led change that have led to the HSUS-UEP historic agreement. During the last 15 years, social and political activism has instigated change to standard food animal production practices, including transport and slaughter. In the 1990s, animal activist organizations directly engaged the food retail sector to promote social responsibility for the welfare of animals used in the supply chain. Major food retailers responded by forming advisory committees, developing policies, and setting standards for their supply chain using market access as leverage for change. In the mid-2000s, the game changed. Social pressure on food retailers was coupled with the citizen referendum and successfully codified housing standards in several states. The targets were housing systems utilizing battery cages, sow gestation stalls, and stalls for veal calf production. A patchwork of legislation emerged. Each state-negotiated law left affected animal industries with serious production and market access issues. Most affected by the differences in state laws was the US egg industry. In 2011, the United Egg Producers (UEP) and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) mutually agreed to pursue federal legislation to set a common baseline for egg production within the United States.

Key Words: bioethics, animal welfare, agreements