



# GIVE THE FACTS ON ANIMAL WELFARE

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BEEF INDUSTRY  
TALKING POINTS

**Animal  
Welfare**

PRODUCERS HAVE ALWAYS HAD TO ADAPT to a changing business environment and keep in touch with what matters to consumers. One thing that is becoming increasingly important to them is animal welfare. This is demonstrated vividly in a statistic reported by the Animal Agriculture Alliance: Donations to animal rights groups with anti-agriculture campaigns increased 40 percent between 2003 and 2004.

It's a trend that continues to rise, says Philip Lobo, communications director for the Animal Agriculture Alliance, where research has shown that people under 25 have views on animal welfare that diverge from those of the rest of the population. "It may be an indicator of what's coming down the pike," Lobo says.

One question they asked participants in their research was about agreement with this statement: “While it is important to be concerned about how farm animals are raised, they can be raised just for food.” Respondents over the age of 25 agreed at a rate of 87 percent. Among respondents 25 and under, 61 percent agreed.

For the statement, “Consumers should have the right to choose what they eat, and what they eat should not be dictated by activists,” those over 25 agreed by 90 percent or more. For those 25 and under, only 75 percent agreed.

Those opinions transfer into price-premium differentials. Of the under-25 group, 42 percent were willing to pay a 5 percent premium for beef sold under humanely raised labels. Among those older than 25, 31 percent overall were willing.

#### ANIMAL-WELFARE LEGISLATION

In 2003, a Gallup study looked at whether people would support different types of legislation concerning animals. For legislation banning the use of animals for product testing, 61 percent opposed; for banning the use of animals for research, 64 percent were opposed. But when it came to legislation concerning treatment of farm animals, only 38 percent opposed the idea.

Don't think this is just a consumer issue, says Janice Swanson, Kansas State University animal science professor. People who are not meat consumers can affect policy. “People who eat and don't eat meat can vote,” she says. “Issues of cruelty, neglect, abuse — people have typically sought legal redress for those through legislation.” Another possible outcome for animal-welfare issues that go unaddressed is

that they can become food-safety issues; one example is downer animals. “That is the downstream effect,” Swanson says. “It can go from a third-tier issue to a first-tier issue. It can do a lot of damage to the industry.”

That's why it's important to pay attention to the issues that come forward and not to get too hung up on the solutions that might be suggested. Those are two separate matters. “Just because they have the wrong solution doesn't mean they aren't identifying a problem,” Swanson says. “We can come up with the right solution.”

Of course, producers have many other issues on their plates, and some producers may be unclear about what animal welfare entails or about the blurry line between animal rights and animal welfare. They may be concerned that talking about animal welfare will mean they will have to make large changes to their operation. Other producers may feel that they are already addressing animal-welfare concerns.

Indeed, good animal welfare can be as simple as applying good husbandry practices on a consistent basis. But that doesn't mean the issue or the concerns can be dismissed. The challenge is to incorporate the new ethics on animal welfare, to be willing to talk about it and to make changes, even small changes, when needed. Attempts to acknowledge, address and discuss the issues create positive perceptions for people. Much of consumers' concern stems from a simple lack of knowledge.

The bottom line is that people are concerned about the quality of life of farm animals. But so are you. ✓

## ANIMAL-WELFARE TALKING POINTS

### BRANDING

- Be honest. Don't say the animal doesn't feel it.
- Branding is the one and only means of permanently, visibly identifying an animal. It's the way we trace individuals for animal health reasons and protection of herd. Put branding into a historical context: For ownership recognition of an individual animal, that was the best technology they had.
- In some states, branding is required by law.
- It is noxious to the animal for a period of time, then it heals.
- The industry is working toward better methods of identifying animals. Electronic tags are likely to be the way of the future.

### CASTRATING

- Done for some of the same reasons that people neuter their pets, such as safety, reduced aggressiveness and prevention of unwanted breeding. It's in the best interest of the animal over its life.
- The industry is working on the anesthesia issue and on better ways to do this.

### TRANSPORTATION

- This is an emerging issue that producers and anyone transporting cattle should be prepared to talk about. The trailers and the techniques are designed to transport cattle safely and comfortably: for instance, the compartments on the truck and the practice of segregating animals by size and gender. Technology has improved greatly with larger trailers that are better ventilated.
- The methods are humane, but we also consider the economic consequences. Increased stress correlates with a threat to animal health.
- Cattle are loaded and unloaded with care and there are proper, approved techniques for doing this.
- People think that having fewer cattle in the trailer is better, but too much space makes them more likely to fall and get injured.
- Drivers are trained. They have a history of delivering animals in good condition.

### PACKING PLANTS

- There's been a great deal of work done on every aspect of slaughter techniques to ensure that it is done in the most humane way. The process is designed to eliminate suffering.
- Packing plants all come under the legislative arm of the Humane Slaughter Act.
- The American Meat Institute has guidelines in place for animal handling at all slaughter plants, which are third-party audited.
- Most of the people who study animal behavior and welfare have decided the cattle don't know what is going to happen. In a well-run system, they are very calm as they move through.
- The stunning process has been the subject of a great deal of research through the years and has been refined to be fast and effective.

*Consumers want to know about the quality of life of farm animals.*