

Animal Welfare Concerns in the Agricultural Industry

Framing question: How can we improve the welfare of animals on farms through legislation?

Why farm animals?

- The legal situation of animals in the agricultural sector is influenced by a history of animal agriculture and domestication, and legal and societal attitudes, which view farmed animals in terms of their economic and property value.
- 98% of domestic animals are farm animals.

U.S. Legislation

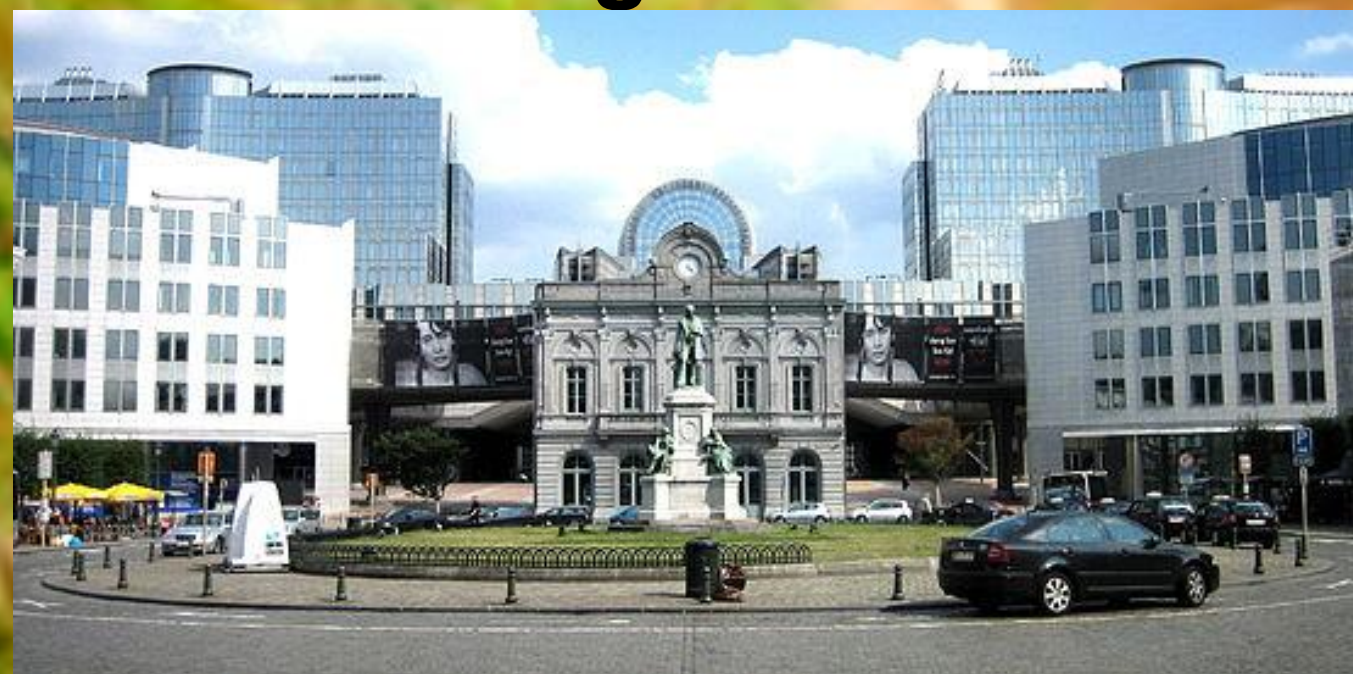


- Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (1958)
 - Requires animals unconscious during slaughter
- Twenty-Eight Hour Law (1873; amended 1994)
 - Requires rest after 28 hours of transport
- Four states either ban battery cages or ban constructions of new battery cage operations
- Nine states ban gestation crates for pigs

Limitations of U.S. Federal Laws

- Don't apply to birds or fish
- No federal regulation on welfare during lives on farms
- 39 states have no regulations of their own
- Laws sparsely enforced
- Enforcement is done largely by the industry itself

EU Legislation



- Eight-hour rule (transport)
- Pigs: No tethering or solitary pens
- Calves: No tethering; must be able to turn around
- Egg-laying hens: Cages must be "enriched"; honest labeling of "free range," "caged," etc. required
- Broiler chickens: Minimum cage size requirements by weight; for "free range," outdoor access must be sufficiently long and uncrowded (Stevenson 2012)
- Sweden meat tax found to decrease emissions from animal agriculture by 12%
- The Council of Europe has created directives, which are not legally binding, but encourage animal welfare standards in member nations

Focus: Why has the US failed to pass animal welfare laws that the EU has passed?

Why the US and EU?

- As fellow Westernized and developed regions, we set the stage for economic and social development.
- Meat consumption rates are highest in Western nations.
 - The United States human population is less than 5% of the global population, but kills more than 10% of the animals killed worldwide for human consumption

Comparative Legal Analysis

- Source animal protection data from World Animal Protection (WAP)
- WAP grades countries A-G (A best, G worst) on animal protection laws
- Take countries with A, B and C grades in companion animal welfare ratings, and average their ratings for farm animal welfare laws, to find correlations (or lack of correlations).
- Take these same countries, and average their healthcare grades. Source these data from Numbeo.

Results from Comparative Analysis

- Countries with A (7), B (6) and C (5) grades in companion animal protection average 6.8, 6.5 and 5.0, respectively, in farm animal welfare laws, suggesting a strong correlation between relatively progressive laws in each category.
- Countries with farm animal protection grades of A, B, and D average healthcare grades of 74.6, 70.9, and 68.5, respectively. (Note: No countries in this sample graded C for farm animal protection).



Above: Farm animal protection grades. Darker colors mean higher grades.

Economic Policy

- In the United States, interstate commerce laws make it difficult to enforce farm animal welfare laws, because states generally cannot regulate interstate commerce.
 - Example: California Proposition 2 prohibits various forms of intensive confinement, but this does not cover meat and dairy products imported from other states.
- Between 1995-2009, the US government gave 73.80% of subsidies to meat and dairy, while only 0.37% to fruits and vegetables
- It can be cheaper to house chickens and other animals in cages, in both the US and Europe

Further Research

- Compare other world regions, beside the United States and Western-to-Central Europe.
- Explore how governmental and educational institutions can work together to promote fair treatment of fellow species.
- Explore whether the same legal frameworks can be used to advance both companion and farm animal protections.
- Study economic incentives and disincentives to pass animal welfare laws.
- Study the effects of meat and dairy subsidies and taxes, and how they directly affect prices
- Compare the effectiveness of activism vs. legislation
- Study consumer perceptions vs. truths of "humane" labels (e.g. do they ban painful procedures being done to the animals?)

Conduct a case study specific to chickens:

- 88% of farm animals in the US are chickens (excluding sea life)
- Chickens on farms not protected by US federal legislation
- Chicken consumption increasing most quickly

Conduct a case study specific to sea life:

- Marine animals are not protected by US federal legislation
- Over half of states have no protections for sea life
- Some state statutes implicitly exclude sea life; the statutes do not mention sea life, so sea animals are assumed not covered by the statutes

Future laws and movements

- California is collecting signatures for a ballot measure that would prohibit certain forms of intensive confinement on any product sold in CA
- Over 150 school districts across the United States participate in Meatless Monday programs
- Self-identified vegans have increased by 600% in the past four years
- Over a third of people buy meat alternatives at least some of the time

Key Takeaway:

- Concerns surrounding humans (healthcare), companion animals, and farm animals can be related.
- Public awareness and activism, legislation, and economic policy are all instrumental in swaying consumer purchasing decisions and protections for animals.

References

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