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Lever, John

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

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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)

### 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’

### Publications


### Why Farm Animal Welfare (FAW)?

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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)

**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.

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.bbfaw.com)
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](http://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](http://www.welfarequality.net))

† 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](http://www.welfarequality.net)).

† 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.

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

By John Lemen

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**

Slaughter process, invisibility, immobility, 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 realised (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 1960s (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.

Thank you!