**Ethical complex-‘ities’: responsible business practice and the big brand takeover of farm animal welfare**

*Mara Miele (Cardiff University, UK*

*John Lever (University of Huddersfield, UK)*

As consumers have become increasingly concerned about food safety and food quality in recent decades public anxiety about the welfare of farmed animals has grown considerably. More recently, in line with the rise of market governance in the food industry, many large food companies have started to address FAW in their corporate responsibility (CSR) strategies. Such practice has allowed corporate retailers and supermarkets the flexibility and freedom to define FAW in their own terms and differentiate brands and product ranges with new quality attributes. Friedberg (2004), looking specifically at the UK, refers to these developments as ‘ethical complex’ – networks and partnerships within which NGOs, media, retailers and other economic and political actors have collaborated to create a specific market for ‘quality’ and ‘ethically’ branded products that lead to mutually beneficial outcomes.  
 In recent years this practice has intensified and FAW has taken on a new significance in line with discourses of business responsibility at the global level. During this period there has been an increase in partnership working between NGOs and global companies on a broad range of sustainability issues (Dauvergne and Lister 2013) and we argue that these developments are illustrative of the expansion of ‘ethical complex’ to larger geographical areas. Drawing on an ongoing analysis of the Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare (BBFAW) (www.bbfaw.com) (Amos and Sullivan 2017), we argue that while these new partnerships have increased awareness of FAW at the global level in a positive way they also illustrate the superficial nature of corporate engagement with FAW. Many global food companies have little or no understanding of what they engage with FAW and we conclude that this is problematic for broader notions of ethicality and sustainability.