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Farm animal welfare discourses: responsible business practice and the role of big brands

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Abstract: As consumers have become increasingly concerned about food safety and food provenance over recent decades farm animal welfare (FAW) has emerged as a growing consumer concern. More recently, the business case for FAW has grown considerably on the back of these developments and many global food companies now address FAW in their corporate responsibility strategies. Building on recent work on the big brand takeover of sustainability, this paper examines the alignment of responsible business with the big brand takeover of FAW through eco-business practice (Dauvergne and Lister 2013).

Despite a growing corporate engagement with FAW in recent years, evidence from the Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare (BBFAW) suggests that many global food companies have little or no understanding of why they engage with FAW. While some big brand companies are starting to make commitments that appear to go beyond the usual public relations “greenwashing”, we argue that this new corporate embrace of FAW is part of a big brand takeover aligned with responsible business practice at the expense of environmental sustainability concerns generated by industrial animal agriculture.