

Preface

Three things immediately impact an animal's everyday life. Is its genetic make-up fit for purpose? Are nutritional needs being met? Is the management providing a proper level of husbandry?

The animal itself may have no immediate interest in the wider trading context within which the farmer – the carer – exists, but nonetheless this impinges hugely upon the life of all farm animals. There is no avoiding the external forces which influence animal life on the farm, such as environmental issues and the global economy. Nonetheless, domesticated livestock are a functional part of profit-making businesses the main present purpose of which is to feed people.

From the perspective of European and United Kingdom animal farming this book deals with all of these issues, and in doing so places animal farming into the forefront of a controversial time line. Where are we now? How did we get here? Where are we going with this? It has been the failings in understanding the past and planning for the future that have led to so many of the misfortunes that have beset the animals on our farms.

The modern world has many experts in the little patches of life, but fewer who attempt to stitch together the fabric of a big picture; economics, science, history. But unless the whole is considered, then the component parts can not be properly understood. Somebody has to try.

Dedication

This book is for Chris, my wife, who shares with animals a mutual understanding and love. It also acknowledges Jan Kielanowski, insistent teller of truths, Christopher Wathes, fellow campaigner for honest science, and Frank Elsley who saw me right.

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Chapter 1. Domestication; a disturbance of nature

Keeping animals on farms – domesticating them – is a matter of livestock control. Control of where and how the animal lives, what it eats and who it breeds with. The purpose of this is to disrupt the natural equilibrium of life.

In nature, life's cycles are balanced so that no element within a stable ecology gains dominance. Before cattle, pigs, poultry and sheep were domesticated, the world was *not* overrun with aurochs, boar, jungle fowl, or mouflon. Populations waxed and waned, but overall they were held in an evolving steady state.

Domestication wilfully tipped the equality of birth and death out of equilibrium. The production of offspring, eggs and milk by domestic livestock far, far exceeds any requirement to achieve merely their replacement rate. In consequence, the animals need special management, extra feeding and better care.

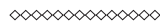
There is very good reason for this. The surplus production is used by human-beings for food – the highest quality of food that can be got. That is the purpose of animal farming.

Farmers have three elements to their responsibilities for the animals they keep: Breeding, Feeding and Management. Breeding concerns genetic and reproductive manipulation. Feeding is not just about nutrient requirements, it is also about foods and eating. Management is first about animal husbandry – welfare by another name. But management is also about marketing and growing the business; about making money to re-invest in the farm, to make animal farming better – for the animals, for the people.

Chapter 4. Subsidisation of animal farming

In the particular case of the United Kingdom, market forces (not hand-outs) make the country – at least for the time-being – largely self-sufficient in three of the animal commodities; poultry-meat, eggs, and liquid milk. However more than half of the farm products eaten in Britain do *not* come from Britain. There is a present danger that liquid milk, eggs, and poultry meat will follow suit. Asia already has a keen eye set to expand sales of chicken and eggs – there is sufficient excess of chicken breast meat that the US is importing it for cat food.

Overall, the trade for animal products Europe-wide is about in balance; Britain being the strongest importer. Imports into the European Union are controlled to some extent by regulations concerning their methods of production – offering some barrier protection for European farmers. (Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show competing farming systems).



Competitive trading favours producers with comparative advantages. Where grain can be grown cheaply, pigs and poultry can be competitively fed. Where grass grows freely – and northern Europe has natural advantages for that – dairy cows, beef and sheep can thrive.

In many cases comparative advantage comes not from nature, but from governmental nurture – from a non-restrictive regulatory climate that encourages the achievement of

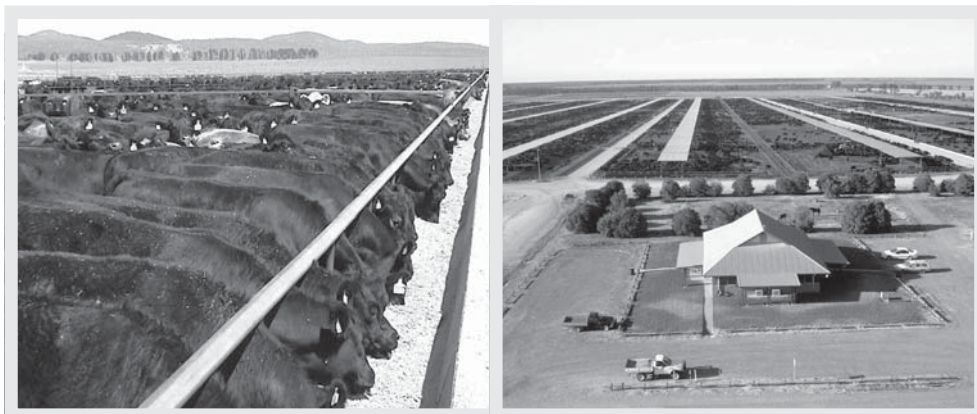


Figure 4.1. Farms such as these (which are in Australia, but similar can be found in many other countries such as Brazil, Canada and US) can generate livestock products on a much greater scale than is traditional in EU and Britain. European systems are also commonly less intensive, and may suggest that they have higher assurance requirements. But scale is not the primary factor affecting either product quality or animal welfare. That is more dependent upon the quality of management and husbandry available. These animals do not graze (see also Figure 6.2), their food is brought to them. The European Livestock industry is protected to a certain extent by import regulations and by Government subsidy (images: beefcentral.com).



Figure 4.2. Half of the pig breeding herd in UK is farmed 'outdoors'. This system is considered welfare-friendly. In European terms, outdoor pig-keeping is unusual, and pig farms are in general smaller in scale than those in North America. The beef herd is grazing pasture grass from which it is possible to fatten animals up to slaughter weight. Such systems have higher costs than those that are larger and more intensive (left image: HelenBrowningsOrganics).

efficiencies in management and in resource use. In these circumstances efficiency savings are usually synonymous with intensification; more output from less infrastructure. Such efficiency gains are likely to be counter to the interests of the animals. And because at the back of decision-making are national government incentives, there can be wide animal-welfare disparities between the many and various nations trading into any single given market.

As long as the foods that people get from domestic livestock are seen as 'commodities' as has been the case till now, the prognosis for livestock farmers and farmed livestock is not good. If on the other hand provenance is given the upper hand and food quality includes where it comes from and how it is produced, then the outlook is much brighter.

Food is not just about nourishment, it is also (in advanced economies) about taste; the 'eating experience'. In developed economies food is eaten for pleasure – assuaging hunger is a by-product of eating; no longer its driving force.

Many farmers have come to the conclusion that the way to deliver a quality eating experience to their customers is to 'de-commodify' their products. To sell directly to consumers. Not just the fresh primary products such as milk, pork, lamb, chicken, eggs and beef, but also secondary products such as cheeses, yoghurts, ice-cream, butter, pies, cured bacon, sausages, cooked meats.

Is there to be no more of 'handout husbandry'? Is it foolish to think that *any* subsidised production process can have a long term future?

Chapter 11. Respect, compassion and business reality

Failure to respect farm animals and show them compassion requires a conspiracy between both farmer and consumer. Each distancing and dissociating themselves from responsibility.

Today, it is no different from fifty – two-hundred and fifty – years ago. Livestock farming can be empathetic, satisfying, and provide all the reason any person might wish for having their life on earth. But it can also be rugged, brutish, and demand a robust outlook on death and misfortune.

It is hard for many urban dwellers to understand the love that livestock farmers can have for their stock whilst also accepting their purpose; to give up their lives to feed us (Figure 11.1). There is little reward outside of human relationships that can possibly approach that gained from the relationship between farmers and their farm animals.

Nonetheless, caring for and sharing in the lives of animals carries with it the acceptance of the harshness of the realities of a life with livestock. Not even the most dedicated of shepherds can say that getting to the hill sheep flock in a blizzard is enjoyable; it is downright



Figure 11.1. *The Animal Farming dilemma. A commercial stock unit (being fed out of a forage delivery truck/forage box). Farming animals has to be a profit-making business. In the interests of the farmer and the animal it helps if it is also a way of life. These may be conflicting ambitions (see also image 4.1) (image: John Eveson).*

Chapter 11. Respect, compassion and business reality

dangerous! There is no delight in digging dead ewes from a snowdrift under a wall either. Nor is a cold winter's day spitting sleet in your face any time to be on a windswept plain feeding outdoor pigs. Dairy farmers whose herds are struck down by Tuberculosis or Foot and Mouth disease rarely fully recover from the bereavement they experience. Farmers of pigs and poultry get great delight from observing the behaviours of intelligent inquisitive animals in conditions of good husbandry, but no delight whatsoever in trying to do their best for those same creatures when they are forced into bad and overcrowded housing.

Common to both the bad times and the good times that make up the life of all who love to look after animals is the knowledge that the underpinning ethos to animal care is respect and compassion.

It is becoming clear that there has been extensive loss of these qualities over the last half century, and modern trends globally will do little to abate that loss. Only 'active steps' will ensure that, under modern livestock farming systems, our domestic livestock are respectfully and compassionately farmed.

In the 1950s, it was sufficient that an animal was kept adequately healthy to grow efficiently and to live until slaughtered. Through the 1980s things improved such that the animal's welfare was a consideration independent of (and indeed above) the need for just health and efficiency. Now it is required, quite properly, to give our farmed animals '*a life worth living*'. A good example of this is the way pregnant sows are kept in the United Kingdom. Sow efficiency is maximised with the use of sow stalls, but pregnant sow stalls severely compromise welfare. Only when the freedom of group housing yards (preferably provided with ample straw) was re-combined with individual feeding through means such as electronic sow feeding could it be said that our sows had '*a life worth living*'.

There is little good purpose in any such 'active steps' toward the improvement of the lives that animals live on our farms at national level *unless* controls are also put into place over international trade of animal derived products. There is no benefit to farmed livestock if the country where they are looked after best has its livestock farms put out of business through their being unable to compete with importations. And yet that is what happens. Meeting responsibilities to farmed animals costs money which must come from the consuming public whose buying habits reflect their moral stance! Theoretically, countries with 'higher' welfare standards could seek to export their products into those other countries where there are buyers wishing to support, with higher prices, better farming conditions for domestic livestock. Or is that merely a fond hope?

There is presently a frank disproportionality. Other countries are able to farm their livestock at lower costs than in Europe and the United Kingdom because they are less restricted by regulations put into place by Brussels to safeguard animals' interests. Regulations such as: density of livestock populations in cages, pens, feedlots, barns, stock-houses, fields; usages of medicines, disease suppressants, and prophylactics; conditions in transporters and in processing plants; training of those responsible for animal care; and so on and so

on...practically every element that might presently be found in European codes of practice manuals for the accreditation and assurance of all aspects of livestock production.

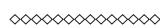
It is not just a matter of uneven government support and subsidisation across those nations that trade in chicken meat, beef, lamb, pork and dairy products – though this is of substantial importance. It is that the rules and regulations that are meant to moderate livestock farms and address issues of animal well-being are different; both across countries freely trading within Europe, and between Europe and other countries exporting animal products into Europe.

It is simplistic for importers of animal products to mollify public opinion with statements to the effect that the welfare of the animals is 'very important to us'. Nor is it sufficient for bland statements to be made to the effect that 'all products coming from overseas are subject to the same regulation of production practices as apply to our own farmers'. Such statements are difficult to uphold, even within Europe. Requirements can differ, as can the timescales for their implementation. Interpretations and strictness of regulation are often regarded as 'local matters'.

At core, it is not government that presently delivers the regulations that control global livestock production, it is the food dealers – the wholesalers, the retailers, the supermarkets. *These* it is who can take upon themselves the responsibility to deliver animal welfare; non-compliant suppliers simply being unable to sell their product. Global food purveyors are now so powerful that they can dictate terms to governments and producers alike. It is they who set the standards for the production of the goods that they buy, process and then sell. They also interpret those terms. The rigour of their imposition will vary according to changing circumstances; both geographic and financial.

There is more, but it is sufficient to say that there are inequalities, and those inequalities in animal respect and compassion contribute significantly to differences between production costs. Where it is possible for home production to satisfy home needs, then it is difficult to suggest other than that there should be complete exclusion of foreign products that are not exactly and explicitly compliant with one's own standards. This would apply to fresh pork, beef, lamb, goat, chicken (broilers), cured and processed meat products, eggs, milk and milk products (cream, yoghurt, cheese, etc.). It would also apply to prepared foods using these products.

It is perhaps foolish for the people of a nation to oversee the emplacement of welfare regulations that will simply ensure the demise of that nation's livestock farming. The animals about which they rightly care will be the worse (not the better) for it.



In intensive pig and poultry production systems, blanket treatments with exogenous drugs, such as antibiotics (though there are other examples including anthelmintics), usually have