Balancing Act: meeting the growing demands for food, enhanced animal well-being and consumer trust

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Levels of Concern about the Food System Are Growing Faster Than Other Concerns

Change in Top Concerns 2011-2012
- U.S. Economy (+2%)
- Rising Health Care Costs (+2%)
- Rising Cost of Food (+2%)
- Rising Energy Costs (+1%)
- U.S. Unemployment (-1)
- Personal Financial Situation (-1)

Change in Food System Concerns 2011-2012
- Safety of Imported Food (+4%)
- Food Safety (+5%)
- Enough to Feed U.S. (+2%)
- Humane Treatment of Farm Animals (+2%)
- Environmental Sustainability Farming (+5%)

Slide courtesy of Charlie Arnot
• What is needed
• Constructive deliberation about food production (capacity to meet demands, methods, implications)

• What we have
• The new politics of food
Current public dialogue on animal welfare

• Corporate agriculture portrayed as cruel, abusive, unsafe, & unsustainable
  – Conventional = bad; alternative = good paradigm

• Norming of terms such as “inhumane,” “cruelty” & “abuse” to describe standard industry practices
  – Impacts on laypersons’ beliefs
The case of sow housing: dueling sound bites

Matthew Prescott, Food Policy Director for the Humane Society of the United States... "It doesn't take a scientist to look at a situation where an animal is crammed in such a tight space, they can't even turn their own body around - just maybe shift a little to the left or the right. We know that farmers can do better."

http://eatocracy.cnn.com/2012/06/06/gestation-crates/
“U.S. meat is derived from humanely treated animals.”

Bar chart showing the distribution of meat quality ratings for 2011 and 2012:
- 2012: 21% 0 to 3, 59% 4 to 7, 20% 8 to 10
- 2011: 21% 0 to 3, 56% 4 to 7, 23% 8 to 10

Graph showing the six-year mean quality ratings:
- 2007: 5.02
- 2008: 4.80
- 2009: 5.50
- 2010: 5.89
- 2011: 5.38
- 2012: 5.24
“I am confident in the safety of the food I eat.”

2011 Mean 6.32

2012 Mean 5.99

Six Year Mean


5.64 5.70 6.31 6.42 6.32 5.99
UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES TO COLLABORATIVELY ADDRESS NEEDS
Consumer challenges

• Use animal welfare to indicate other attributes, e.g., safety & health (Harper & Makatouni, 2002)
• Bombarded with negative information (e.g., animal abuse scandals)
• Concerns/dislikes regarding intensive food animal production practices
  – Animals in boxes
  – Cutting bits/parts off animals
  – Animals in pain/distress
• Relatively unaware of efforts to address welfare
• Main sources of AW information
What should you do? What can you do?

- Consumers/citizens may feel disempowered to change food systems not aligned with values
- May try to drive markets with voting and purchasing power
  - Escalated market demand for attributes such as “organic,” “free-range,” “humane,” “low carbon footprint,” “sustainable”
Producer challenges

• Real public concern or just activist agendas?
• Frustrated that source of change is retailer-not “market-driven”
• Feel uninformed, unprepared to make changes
• Frustrated at consumer contradictions, especially WTP
• What level of welfare will satisfy customers?
  – Can they be satisfied?
Balancing Act for Sustainable Food Animal Production

- People
  - Producers
  - Consumers
  - Workers
  - Others
- Animals
- Environment
- Economics
- ETHICS

- What systems/practices better support behavioral aspects of welfare while maintaining animal health & productivity?
- What systems/practices work for producers of all scales?
- What can be done to minimize environmental impacts?
- What are the financial costs?