

Conversation with Dena Jones of Animal Welfare Institute, February 6, 2014

Participants

- Dena Jones – Farm Animal Program Manager, Animal Welfare Institute
- Eliza Scheffler – Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Dena Jones.

Summary

GiveWell spoke to Ms. Jones as part of its investigation of the cause of farm animal welfare. Ms. Jones described the Animal Welfare Institute's work on farm animal issues, which spans the full production cycle of raising animals for food, from animals' lives on farms, to transport, slaughter, and the labeling and marketing of animal products. AWI mainly works on policy at the federal level, especially on regulations, and it administers a high welfare certification program called Animal Welfare Approved. The conversation also covered the field of farm animal protection at large – positive changes, promising approaches, and other organizations involved.

About AWI

AWI was founded in Washington, D.C. in 1951 with the mission of reducing the sum total of suffering inflicted on animals by people, mainly through work on public policy. AWI's policy initiatives cover legislation, litigation and regulatory reform, both in the US and abroad.

Work on farm animals

AWI works on issues facing wildlife, marine mammals, lab animals and farm animals. It is one of the only groups that has worked on farm animals since its founding, which makes AWI one of the older groups in the farm animal movement today. AWI is a farm animal welfare group, as distinct from a farm animal rights group, because it believes that animals can have lives worth living on farms. AWI aims to substantially increase the welfare of animals raised for food, rather than eliminate animal agriculture, though it endorses the work that other groups do to reduce consumption of animal products.

Currently, about 20% of AWI's staff is dedicated to working on farm animal issues, excluding those working for the Animal Welfare Approved farm certification program. The AWI farm animal policy team has 2-3 full time staff. For 2014, AWI's total operating budget is \$5.1 million.

AWI's farm animal policy team focuses on federal and international policy, because work at this level is high leverage, and because AWI does not have the resources to

work in all states. However, AWI has done some work at the state level, including assisting five states in setting farm animal welfare standards for the first time.

Much of AWI's policy work focuses on regulation. Working through the rulemaking process is more promising than advocating for legislation that helps farm animals, because it is very difficult to get a bill passed at the federal level, but the regulations already exist and can be strengthened. The most difficult part is getting the USDA to take action on a rulemaking petition; sometimes this can be triggered by an undercover investigation exposing abusive treatment of farm animals, or threatening to sue the USDA for not responding to a petition or not granting it, though it is difficult to win a case for the latter. The USDA has a dual mandate to protect the consumer and promote market support for agriculture, which biases it against valuing animal welfare for its own sake. Ms. Jones said that it would be better if a separate agency presided over animal agriculture, such as an animal protection agency.

Program areas for farm animal policy

AWI's farm animal policy work is broken down into four program areas based on the stages of farm animals' lives: on farm practices, transport, slaughter, and labeling/marketing of animal products.

On farm practices

AWI participates in a coalition of organizations that lobby at the federal and state level. AWI has also introduced farm animal protection bills in some states, held legislative briefings and hearings on farm animal issues in Congress, and testified in hearings and briefings in federal and state legislatures. There are currently no federal laws that affect the lives of animals on farms, and it is unlikely that any will be passed in the near future. There are some state laws banning egregious practices, but they've mainly been passed in states that don't have a lot of animal agriculture, so they haven't directly affected that many animals. Because legislation is currently not highly promising, much of AWI's on farm work focuses on the federal regulatory system.

AWI is the lead group working on how farm animals are treated under the USDA Certified Organic program. There are very few regulations specific to animal welfare in the Organic program. AWI made recommendations to the National Organic Standards advisory board, which took them to the USDA, but the USDA has not acted on them and is not required to do so. Currently, AWI is pressuring the USDA to act on these recommendations. While most animal protection groups would not consider Organic certification to be an indicator of high welfare, AWI believes there is potential to raise the welfare standard it requires. AWI's recommendations for the Organic program include minimum space requirements for animals indoors and outdoors, requiring vegetation in animals' outdoor spaces, and banning certain practices, such as tail docking of cows.

Transport

AWI is currently focusing its work in this area internationally, specifically on the trade of live cattle shipped from the US to Europe by boat. Approximately 200,000 cattle are shipped from the US every year. Recently there was an incident of 1000 dairy cattle dying on a ship to Russia.

AWI petitioned the USDA to review and amend the export regulations that pertain to how animals are treated, and the USDA granted this petition. Once the USDA writes a proposed rule, it will be posted in the federal register, at which point AWI and other organizations will submit comments to push for stronger regulations. Changes in the regulations could improve the welfare of animals in transport, and may reduce the total number of animals shipped by restricting the conditions of transport.

Slaughter

AWI has reviewed the enforcement of humane slaughter laws at state and federal slaughter facilities on three occasions over the last ten years. In the summer of 2013, AWI submitted a rulemaking petition to the USDA to request changes to the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act regulations, which cover meat animals but not poultry. AWI recently met with the USDA to request that it grant the petition.

Obtaining humane slaughter regulation for birds is one of the primary objectives of the animal protection movement, because there are 9 billion birds killed every year in the US, more than any other animal. In 1995, AWI and the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) submitted a rulemaking petition to the USDA to request the regulation of bird slaughter, but it was not successful. For the past two years, AWI has been working with Farm Sanctuary to research the treatment of birds in US slaughter facilities. In December 2013, the organizations filed a rulemaking petition asking the USDA to write regulations for the humane handling of birds at slaughter. Now, these groups are lobbying the USDA to grant the petition by getting organizations and individuals to contact the USDA to state their support. The animal agriculture industry, which opposes the petition, also lobbies the USDA by writing letters, arranging meetings with top officials and using their political connections.

Labeling and marketing

AWI has been reviewing the USDA's process for approving label claims such as "humanely raised." To acquire this information, AWI submitted Freedom of Information Act requests to the USDA, some of which took more than a year to be fulfilled. AWI will soon release the results of this investigation, which will include recommendations for how the USDA can improve its process for approving labeling claims regarding animal welfare. Improving the regulation of labeling claims is important for the public, because labels are often the only source of information people have about the conditions in which animals were raised, and currently they are not reliable.

In addition to working through the USDA, AWI has addressed oversight by the private sector. AWI filed complaints with the National Advertising Division of the Better Business Bureau (BBB) about two producers' use of the claim "humanely raised." After the BBB investigated these cases, one of the producers agreed to remove the claim from some of its products and the other agreed to stop using the claim completely. AWI has also approached grocery store chains and food retailers regarding claims made on store brands, and a few of those claims have been removed or changed.

Market research over the last ten years has shown that consumers consider humane claims to be more important than "organic" or "natural" claims. Humane claims can increase sales, and the industry is aware of that. For example, Tyson Foods, the largest chicken producer in the US, started a "naturally raised" line of products that come from animals raised to a slightly higher-welfare standard. Tyson is having the USDA audit this claim. If Tyson can earn a larger profit from its "naturally raised" products, it may convert more of its production to that standard.

Certification programs and Animal Welfare Approved

In addition to public policy, AWI works with corporations directly to improve animal welfare. In the 1980s, AWI became the first entity in the US to have a pasture-raised label and corresponding standards approved by the USDA. These standards were implemented in the 1990s by Niman Ranch, a major network of alternative cattle and pork producers in the midwestern and western US. In the 2000s, AWI's pasture-raised standards grew into what is now Animal Welfare Approved (AWA), a high welfare food certification program that operates within AWI separately from the farm animal policy team. Currently, just 10-12% of the animals raised for food in the US are covered under a higher welfare program. There is capacity within these programs to extend the certification to more producers and more animals.

Changes for farm animals

Farm animal issues only got on the agenda of most major animal protection groups about twenty years ago. Prior to that, groups were focused on companion animals, wildlife and lab animals. Some changes for farm animals are going to take decades, because the animal agriculture industry is huge. However, it is unquestionable that change will continue in every area - legislative, regulatory, corporate practices and production practices. Each of these areas is interrelated, so while most groups focus in a certain area, the work is not in isolation.

In recent years, many positive changes have occurred: enforcement of the federal humane slaughter law has improved, corporations have implemented changes in response to campaigns, legislation in some states has banned some of the most egregious farming practices, and farmers have switched to higher welfare production because of the market demand. However, there is still much work to be done. It is still very difficult for small farmers in the US to stay in business.

Promising approaches

The most promising approaches for improving animal welfare seem to be those that target corporations and regulations. These are the areas that have seen the most progress in recent years. Consumers are an important part of this work, but in the US, consumers don't have sufficient information to make very informed choices. When surveyed, 80-90% of people say they support getting hens out of cages, but only 5% of eggs sold in the supermarket are cage free. This indicates that there is an opportunity to shift more consumption to higher welfare products. It could be beneficial to create an advertising campaign to educate consumers about how to identify options that are higher welfare. Another way of addressing this issue would be to lobby the USDA to require that information about animal welfare be printed on packaging.

Other organizations in the space

United States

Some of the main organizations working on US federal policy for farm animals are AWI, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and Farm Sanctuary. AWI is part of a coalition that includes all the major groups working on farm animal issues in the US. Groups have different areas of focus depending on their staff and budget size, mission, expertise and priorities. There is widespread agreement on most issues, such as banning gestation crates for pigs, and very few points of disagreement between groups. However, there is a range in philosophies from animal rights to animal welfare.

The farm animal welfare movement started in earnest about 25 years ago and has picked up significantly in the last ten years. Though funding for farm animal welfare is small relative to that for companion animals, it is also greater today than it has ever been.

International

Most countries in the world, including the US, belong to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), which began setting international standards for farm animal welfare in 2005. Adoption of the standards is voluntary. Twice a year, the OIE proposes changes or additions to these standards that are sent to all of the constituent countries. When the USDA receives the proposed changes or additions to the OIE's animal welfare standards, it shares them with a list of stakeholders that includes AWI. In partnership with a few other animal protection organizations, AWI will review the proposals and submit recommendations to the USDA to support or oppose certain changes to the standards, aiming to influence the USDA's comments submitted to the OIE. In 2013, the USDA incorporated a number of AWI's recommendations in its comments. The US has a lot of influence internationally, so its position on OIE proposals is important.

AWI belongs to two international coalitions that have the sole purpose of lobbying the World Organization for Animal Health. In the International Coalition for Animal Welfare, AWI is the only US member other than the international arm of the Humane Society of the United States.

Person for GiveWell to talk to

- Leah Garces, USA Director, Compassion in World Farming

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