

'Knowing Animals' conference in Florence

Theme 1: Naturality: cowness, pigness, chickeness

Naturality of farm animals as a prerequisite for welfare – different perspectives between Dutch and Norwegian citizens

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Most citizens in modern societies have little personal knowledge or experience of farming. In order to understand how citizens perceive and evaluate modern farming, we conducted farm visits with citizen panels in Norway and the Netherlands. We asked citizens to register what they saw, heard, smelled and felt and what they appreciated (or not) on the farm. Animals had a prominent place in people's experience and appreciation of farm life. Animals were considered to naturally belong on a farm. At the same time citizens worried about the ability of animals to preserve their naturalness. Dutch citizens wanted animals to be kept in an environment that resembles nature as much as possible. They should be free to move and expressing their natural needs. Dairy cows belonged in the pasture and calves with their dams. Norwegian respondents also appreciated a 'natural situation' in animal husbandry. But they associated 'natural animal keeping' primarily with keeping to Norwegian farming traditions. They also clearly distinguished farm animals from wild animals. The study demonstrates that citizens of both countries consider the naturality of farm animals' life important for their welfare but differ in what they consider and appreciate as natural. The concept of naturality relates to farming traditions, the geographical setting and national understanding and construction of nature.

This presentation is part of the PhD project "The Socio-Cultural Sustainability of Animal Farming. An inquiry into social perceptions of dairy farming in the Netherlands and Norway"

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