

ON ANIMAL WELFARE AND SELF-INTEREST

Producers that want to sell animal-friendly products would be wise to stress what's in it for the consumer, concludes Lenka van Riemsdijk, a Marketing and Consumer Behaviour PhD candidate who received her doctorate on 2 December.

Consumers care about animal welfare but that is not always reflected in their purchasing behaviour. 'Consumers | experience a social dilemma, a conflict between their own interests such as a cheap price and the interests of society

'It's harder to steer consumers who experience dilemmas towards a particular choice'

such as animal welfare,' explains Van Riemsdijk. 'In most cases their own interests take precedence because people are naturally inclined to do what is best for themselves.'

Van Riemsdijk studied how this self-interest could be used to encourage consumers to buy animal-friendly meat and thereby improve animal welfare. In an online survey, she showed 575 consumers chicken products that she recommended using different approaches. This showed that the most appreciated

products were those where the marketing keyed into emotions or curiosity. 'Yet curiosity in particular is rarely used. Producers could add "fun facts" on animal welfare to the packaging, for example. Or highlight an improved flavour thanks to more animal-friendly husbandry. The important thing is to make the link between personal benefits and animal welfare.'


'Marketing strategies geared purely to emphasizing animal welfare are not effective for most consumers,' says Van Riemsdijk. The government's current campaigns don't help either. 'They mainly stress the negative aspects of meat, so they actually make the social dilemmas worse. And we know it's harder to steer consumers who experience dilemmas towards a particular choice. Perhaps it would be better to change the message to: Eat less meat and when you do, choose an animal-friendly product.' Producers can use Van Riemsdijk's insights to set up their marketing in such a way that it removes this social dilemma that consumers struggle with. She thinks there are big welfare gains to be made with the right marketing. 'You still see supermarkets selling discounted factory-farmed meat. I think supermarkets should act more responsibly and take animal welfare seriously. Give animal-friendly products a fair chance.'  TL

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