

# *Relating Economics to Animal Welfare*



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**Animal Behavior, Housing, & Well-Being Symposium:  
*What Does This Study Say About Well-Being? Caveats and  
Considerations***

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# Situational Background on Economic Fit

- Many are happy economists only ‘have two hands’ ...
  - **Supply**
    - Interest in anything impacting costs of producing, processing, or marketing livestock or derived meat, milk, and egg products
      - Gestation stalls, laying hen cages ...
      - Regular provision of clean and fresh feed and water
  - **Demand**
    - Interest in anything impacting acceptance and valuation of livestock or derived meat, milk, and egg products
      - Gestation stalls, laying hen cages ...
      - Regular provision of clean and fresh feed and water
- Most economists think the majority of debates and conversations over food production (including AW) have core economic components



# Situational Background on Economic Fit

- The Center For Food Integrity (@foodintegrity) tweeted on Wed, Sep 04, 2013:

“Science tells us if we can do something. (supply)

Society tells us if we should do it.” (demand)

- Think about gestation stalls, laying hen cages, regular provision of clean and fresh feed and water ...



# Economic Realities Going Forward

- Outcomes will only partially align with best or optimal AW outcomes
  - Economic &/or political optimality will trump AW optimal
  - Public will give license to utilize only a subset of available production options that ‘technically work’
  - Vote-buy disconnect will persist
- Not unique to AW: food safety, environment,...



# Nomenclature

## ➤ ‘animal welfare’

- well-being, care, and handling of livestock being raised for meat, milk, and egg production (Tonsor)
- likely mismatched with bench science view
- perhaps better aligned with base public view

# Nomenclature

- Critical to recognize role of both subjective and objective terminology, assessment, etc.
  - Regardless of accuracy, influence follows perceptions
    - ‘perception is reality’ concept
  - Degrees of nomenclature frustration always have and will persist
    - ‘Mad cow,’ ‘swine flu,’ ‘pink slime,’ ....
    - ‘cages’ vs ‘stalls’ – ‘laying hen cage’ vs. ‘battery cage’ ....
  - Do not get caught up arguing specifics only to miss broader point
    - What impacts AW debates more: accurate phrases or pictures?



# Nomenclature

- Reasons ‘inaccurate’ AW terminology will likely persist:
  - Emotional subject
    - AW discussions trigger cues (e.g. gestation stalls & food safety) which reinforces emotion and may cloud technical accuracy
  - Engagement by many stakeholders outside the scientific community
  - Private market, product differentiation incentives
    - Think ‘natural’ and ‘organic’ ...
  - Vote-buy disconnect
    - Can be influential w/o \$ stake in the discussion – lead to persist misuse/inaccurate verbiage



# Impacts of AW Growing as ‘Hot Topic’

- All hot areas attract interest given actual and possible \$ at stake
- Academic systems encourage tweaking things to highlight ‘novel contributions’
- However, don’t forget everything isn’t “bad”:
  - Additional and diverse perspectives may lead to break-thru





# Tonsor's Overall Take

- AW is one of several “social challenges” here to stay even when ‘hot topic’ label no longer applies
- Clarifying nomenclature internally is valuable, over-investing in efforts to clarify externally may not be
- I wish “KISS” applied but it doesn’t...



More information available at:



This presentation will be available in PDF format at:

<http://www.agmanager.info/about/contributors/individual/tonsor.asp>

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