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Commodifying animal welfare

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Abstract

As the profile of farm animal welfare rises within food production chains, in response both to consumer demand and greater ethical engagement with the lives of animals, animal welfare is increasingly being commodified by various foodchain actors. That is to say that, over and above regulatory or assurance scheme compliance, welfare conditions and criteria are being used as a 'value-added' component or distinctive selling point for food products, brands or even particular manufacturers and retailers. We argue in this paper that such a commodification process has major implications both for the way in which farm animal welfare is defined and assessed (with greater emphasis being placed either on those welfare elements that lend themselves to commodification processes or on those that respond to consumer interpretations of what 'good' welfare might be at a particular time) and for the ways in which farm animal welfare is articulated and presented to food consumers as a component of product value or quality.

Keywords: animal welfare, commodification, consumption, free-range eggs, market, welfare assessment