

ANIMAL WELFARE GROUPS – WHO’S WHO AND WHAT’S WHAT

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ABSTRACT

In any society, the way animals are treated by people reflects a common morality. In the last three decades the purchase and consumption of food in western societies has become a method for the individual to express ideas, identity and moral convictions. The assignment of ideological values to food and food choices has facilitated expression of consumer concern related to some aspects of agriculture, biotechnology, methods of production and animal welfare. Many consumers of animal products such as meat, milk, eggs and fish are concerned about how animals are treated in production, slaughter and transport. Non-consumers of products of livestock production also have a voice in the societal discussion around sustainable agriculture and a healthy planet. Both consumer and non-consumer opinions have the potential to be reflected in and change public policy in well functioning democracies. New social cause activist groups have emerged often focused on a single animal welfare issue. The motivation for membership in such groups is often not collective material benefit but an individual expressive reward realized by solidaristic interaction with like minded or prestigious people within the group.

INTRODUCTION

Consulting the public in developing government policy is in part a response to a trend for non-profit or special interest groups in pluralist democratic societies to challenge government policies post hoc. Science as the pre-eminent underpinning support of good public policy has come under challenge from public opinion which often contains a component of fear or moral outrage.

Media has been instrumental in feeding and is a beneficiary of public concern over perceived food safety risks, “unnatural” farming practices, animal welfare questions and possible environmental dangers of agriculture practices. The expectation for government to respect “moral and ethical” concerns of the public is well established. The articulation of the moral connotations of food purchase, consumption and production and the political positioning and lobbying of those convictions has become a significant growth industry in Europe and to a increasing extent in North America. In addition social cause activist groups (SCAG’s) have identified that fear and moral outrage can be profit centers for a thriving business model. This paper will explore current parameters and evolutionary trends in the commercialization of public policy consultation and specifically the development of the animal welfare focus.

MORALIZATION: GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

Government decisions in the areas of food safety and farming practices are increasingly affected by widely divergent views of the general public (Thiermann, 2000). As food consumption and inter alia food production practices have taken on moral importance and are no longer the lone purvey of individual choice, there is increasing pressure if not justification in democratic societies for regulatory intervention in livestock production. Regulatory intervention should express and reflect the will of the people.

In some social circles the act of eating has progressed from being a source of nutrition and sensory pleasure to being a social marker, an aesthetic experience, a source of meaning and a metaphor, and often a declaration of moral entity (Rozin, 1996). “Moral (Ethical) Vegetarians” claim to be mindful of both short and long-term consequences of individual choice and although personal health is recognized as a partial motivator for a vegan choice there is a much broader commitment to vegetarianism as a way of life (Fox, 2000). Moral vegetarians view meat avoidance as a moral imperative and are upset by others who participate in meat consumption. This is in stark contrast to health or religious motivated vegetarians who are generally neutral to the food choices of other people (Rozin et al., 1997).

Recent study of adolescent vegetarianism identified a largely female phenomenon characterised by meat avoidance, weight loss behaviours and a high concern with body appearance (Worsley and Skrzypiec, 1997; 1998). Teenage vegetarians are more likely to be Caucasian, from a higher socio-economic stratum, practice various weight control strategies and also have an increased concern for the environment, animal welfare, and gender equality compared to non-vegetarian peers (Perry et al., 2001; Janda and Trocchia, 2001). Vegetarianism among teenage women is different from traditional western culture vegetarianism, which has primarily a nutritional or religious basis. The prevalence of vegetarianism (those who do not consume red meat) in one South Australia study is 8-10% for teenage women and 1-2% for teenage men (Worsley and Skrzypiec, 1998). The prevalence of vegetarian tendencies however was 32-37% for teenage women. Teenage vegetarians believe that meat production is morally wrong for animal welfare reasons and harms the environment.

Moral vegetarianism may be seen as an extreme example of a general trend in public opinion of farming practices. Current public concern regarding farming is frequently based on a mix of animal welfare, human health and environmental quality concerns (Fessler et al., 2003) and is in fact a manifestation of a philosophy of life (Lindeman and Sirelius, 2001; Fox, 2000). This gender related, anti-meat focus should be of concern to livestock producers as women may have a disproportionate future influence in food purchasing patterns for families, as is currently the case.

Moralization is a process that works at both individual and cultural levels and involves the acquisition of moral qualities by objects or activities that previously were morally neutral. Moralization is the process where a preference is converted into a value (Rozin et al., 1997). When behaviour becomes moralized the individual will seek multiple justifications for the relevant conviction. In the anti-factory-farm movement a combination of justification

arguments including the destruction of the family farm, environmental concerns, animal welfare concerns and revulsion at “un-natural” husbandry practices are evoked in rationalizing and articulating an anti-intensive farming world view (Rowan et al., 1999).

Moralization is a gradual conversion of individual preference into societal values. A critical difference between preferences and values is that values are much more likely to be transmitted within the family environment and values are subject to institutional and legal support (Rosin et al., 1997). Bill C-22, the amendment to the Canadian Criminal Code regarding the protection of animals is clearly the result of a process of moralization and of regulatory response to that moralized cultural consensus (Anonymous, 1998).

THE SOCIAL CAUSE ACTIVIST GROUP (SCAG) AND DEMOSCLEROSIS

The number of interest groups engaging in political lobbying has increased dramatically since 1970. It is estimated that the number of interest groups doubled in the United States from 1955 to 1970; doubled again from 1970 to 1990 and reached 20,000 identified interest groups in 1995 (Rauch, 1999). Such groups are often given to expressions of moral outrage over single often new-value issues (Schweikhardt and Browne, 2001). The motivation for membership in such groups is often not collective material benefit but an individual expressive reward realized by solidaristic interaction with like minded or prestigious people within the group.

Demosclerosis is a term coined in the United States to describe an increasing inefficiency within government to clearly identify the public good and protect that public good in policy development (Rauch, 1994; 1999). If as often suggested, an astute democratically elected administration identifies which way the mob is going and then positions itself as the leader; it has become increasingly difficult to clearly identify the consensus of the electorate on many issues of social conscience. In the operation of government, so many conflicting consumer and public interests groups vie for political consideration that effective decision making is prevented.

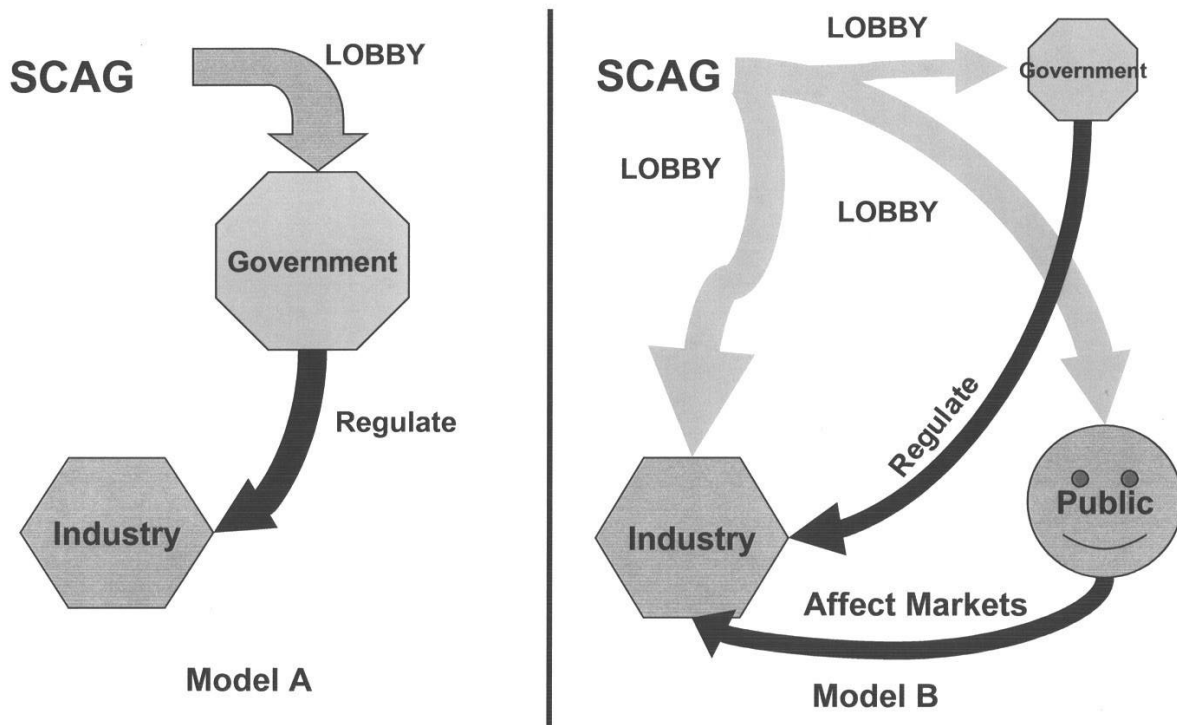
In the recent past, SCAGs have emerged which no longer rely on traditional legislative means to achieve their political ends. Instead of lobbying primarily for better laws or better enforcement of laws, they have focused on the marketing chain and affecting consumer choice or generating fear in the manufacturer that consumer choice may be affected (Figure 1). The increasing effectiveness of SCAG food directed campaigns in part result from 3 converging forces in food production in North America; congestion in legislative channels, rising affluence of the consumer allows for preference for products with specific attributes and the concentration of the consumer food markets make targeting far easier (Schweikhardt and Browne, 2001).

As an example; in 1999 Greenpeace sent an innocuous fax to Gerber with the simple request for information related to whether the company had taken steps to avoid the use of genetically modified (GM) ingredients in baby food. Within days Gerber announced it would limit the use of GM ingredients in baby food. This in one aspect was an astonishing announcement

considering Gerber is owned by Novartis a major developer of GM seeds (Schweikhardt and Browne, 2001). Greenpeace was able to accomplish in hours what one could only estimate would take years for the government regulatory process to accomplish if there was a scientific or human health basis for regulating GM content of food.

Figure 1. Organizational models for Social Cause Activist Group (SCAG) targeting of campaign message.

Model A is the traditional Greenpeace type environmental protection campaign which predominated in the 1970's and was directed toward government and regulators to improve environmental protection regulations. Current SCAG activities are better described by Model B where the message is simultaneously directed to governments, the general public and directly to the industry where there is a perceived vulnerability such as the Gerber Company and baby food (see text). Other examples of this approach are the polystyrene clamshell controversy well described by Svoboda and the regulation of primate research facilities in "The Monkey Wars" (Blum, 1985).



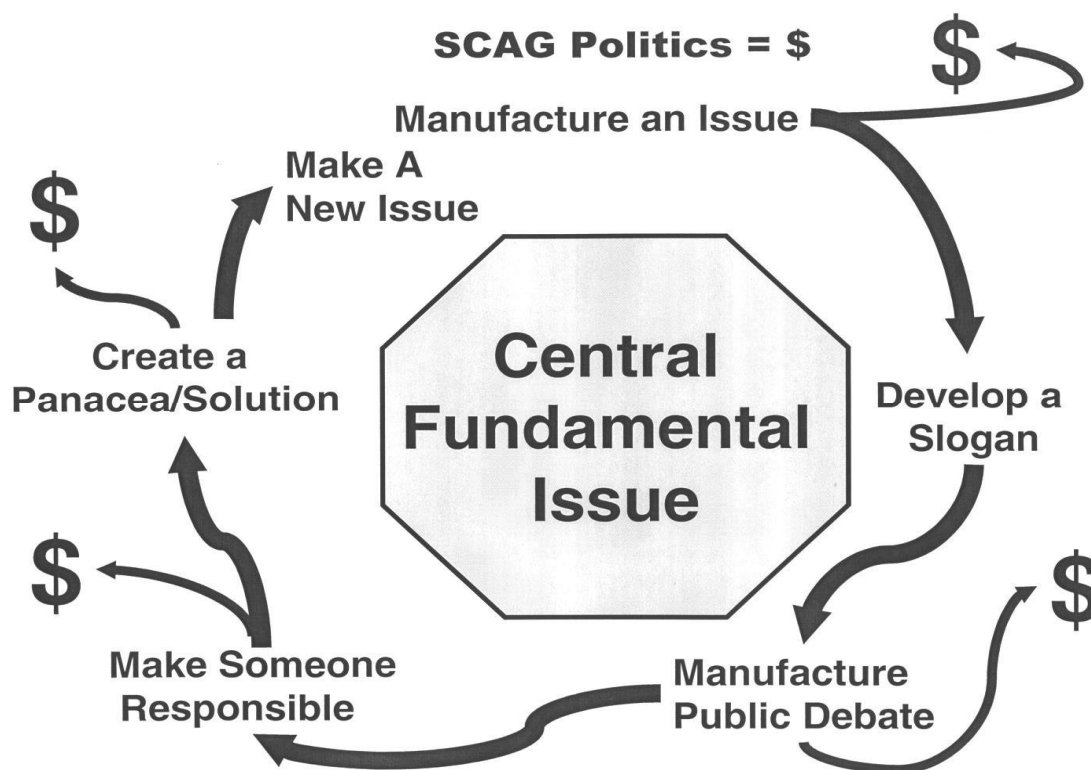
Similarly in part due to Greenpeace anti-GM potato campaign, McCain's announced in November 1999 that it would not purchase GM potatoes. The GM potatoes in question are arguably not inherently evil as their presence would have avoided the great Irish potato famine had they been available in 1845. Harrison McCain defended the decision by indicating; "We are in the business of giving our customers what they want, not what we think they should have" (Gray, 2000).

Social cause activist groups are usually non-profit organizations which derive financial support from the voluntary contributions of members. As memberships to the group must be sold to raise funds, then marketing of the group message (product) is most important. In the

development and maintenance of these interest groups, as funds are raised they must be spent to maintain “non-profit” status and this requires a continuous series of campaigns (Figure 2). A successful SCAG campaign has two components; firstly, it actually must accomplish at least some of the goals identified in the campaign which was originally promised; secondly, the campaign product must provide the SCAG with considerable increase in profile and/or increase income from voluntary contributions.

Figure 2. Operational model for Social Cause Activist Group (SCAG) targeting of campaign message for fund raising and enhancing visibility.

The central issue is chosen for simplicity of messaging. Campaigns must also have a target such as an influential player in the food industry (eg. Gerber, McDonald’s). The primary lesson from the PeTA success story is a campaign must have unambiguous and achievable objectives. The campaign will usually focus on one small aspect of an overall production system which has been targeted. The central fundamental issue must be easy to understand for the target audience to be able to believe they have an honest and valid opinion on the issue. The issues most likely to be capitalized are those that can be portrayed as unnatural, horrendous or brutal and the result of human greed or lack of caring (dehumanizing). Each step in the iteration of a campaign provides the opportunity for the SCAG to generate profile and income for its operations (\$ in figure). Often these campaigns do result in changes in practices of the system targeted. Future targets in livestock production will be the issues which can be made to fit the PeTA five-step process (Mealey, 2002).



People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PeTA) is a non-profit SCAG that has an excellent template for success (Table 1) with 2002 annual contributions at slightly under 24 million (PeTA, 2002) and a proven track record for achieving results.

An example of a successful SCAG environmental campaign is the “Ronald McToxic Campaign” originating with the Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste (CCHW) in the early 1980’s (Svoboda 1995a; 1995b). The campaign targeted a single goal, that of forcing McDonalds to eliminate the use of polystyrene packaging within the fast food chain. By 1989 school children, the backbone of McDonald’s customer base had been recruited as part of the “Kids Against Polystyrene” movement and Burger King had switched to paperboard containers. A more holistic goal or campaign target such as decreasing the overall disposable packaging is not in the best interest of the SCAG. A topic such as “minimizing packaging waste” does not meet the standard of an unambiguous and achievable objective in the business model for a successful SCAG campaign (PeTA Step 1 of 5, Table1).

Table 1. The lessons for corporations to be taken from examining PeTA's career to date include the following five-step process (Mealey, 2002).

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1. Campaign must have unambiguous and achievable objectives
 2. Utilize a range of tactics, and never underestimate the Internet
 3. Segment your target audience into defined targets
 - a. “Cruelty to Go” (Target: house-spouse, weakness guilt for purchase of fast food)
 - b. “Meat Stinks” (Target: Vegan leaning Teens)
 - c. “Don’t be a Milk Sucker” (Target: Young Teens message milk causes acne)
 - d. “McUnhappy Meals” (Target: Direct to children <10 years old)
 4. Organize campaign strategy to maximize the domino effect (minimum cage size for laying hens in McDonalds supply chain triggers slightly larger minimum cage size in Burger King supply chain)
 5. Keep the pressure constant
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The outcome of the McToxic campaign can be viewed as a success. McDonald’s Corporation completely reviewed its environmental strategy and was able to initiate remarkable decrease in packaging used, primarily by source reduction. In the 1970’s an average meal of Big Mac, fries and a shake required 46 grams of packaging, in 1995 it required 25 grams, a 46% reduction (Svoboda, 1995a). The CCHW went on to become a very solvent SCAG with a 1990 budget of \$689,908.00 (Svoboda, 1995a) and changing its name to Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ) reflecting a new mandate to deliver a broader line of products (www.chej.org/). Many US based non profit organizations (MADD, PeTA) post the annual financial statement, IRS Form 990, Return of Organization Exempt from Tax Income on their website; the CHEJ does not.

For food safety reasons, fast food must be packaged and held in a manner that will keep food warm and sanitary. As it turns out, the actual polystyrene clamshell debate is irrelevant on an environmental basis. In comparative environmental cost analyses, which are quite complex, comparing polystyrene which is a recyclable petrochemical product with non-recyclable wax paperboard which contributes to deforestation, the polystyrene is probably a slight overall environmental advantage (Svoboda, 1995a). In North America, due to concern for the environment, specifically CFC’s and ozone depletion, McDonald’s limits use of polystyrene

packaging. Due to concern for the environment in the United Kingdom with an emphasis on concern for deforestation, McDonald's has used polystyrene in preference to wax paperboard packaging. The environmental concern argument can be used to support either anti-paperboard (save the trees) or anti-polystyrene (save the ozone) political agenda. McDonalds UK has recently piloted a new clamshell material made from limestone and starch which is fully bio-degradable and responds to both arguments (EarthShell, www.earthshell.com/).

A similar SCAG single issue animal welfare example is provided by the "Monkey Wars", the campaign to regulate primate research facilities in the USA (Blum, 1995). Early on in the debate scientists confused the public campaign with an interest in improving the welfare of primates used in medical research. It became clear that improving primate welfare was not to be the focus of the debate. The debate would be focused on regulating the minimal cage size for animals. "Improving the welfare of animals" is too fuzzy a premise to base an effective SCAG campaign around. It is not an unambiguous and achievable objective. The focus on regulating minimal cage size does meet the specificity criteria and had the added benefit that retooling a facility for new standard cage size was about the most expensive capital investment a research facility could imagine. The goal of regulated minimal cage size was achieved, and many facilities abandoned primate research for financial reasons as the cost of re-caging was just too high. It is undetermined whether the general welfare of primates used in medical research in the United States has actually improved subsequent to the regulatory changes (Blum, 1995).

A current active campaign in livestock production is one to eliminate the use of sow gestation stalls by regulatory prohibition in Australia (www.animal-lib.org.au/docs/sowstall.shtml), and Manitoba (Quit Stalling, www.quitstalling.ca/). It is possible that this unambiguous and achievable objective could be reached and the actual overall welfare of sows in pork production not be improved. Assessing the welfare of gestating sows is a multifactor issue plagued by considerable uncertainty as the scientific assessment of many potential alternate systems is lacking (Bracke et al., 2002a; 2002b). Regulatory actions affecting structural standards with high capital investment such as housing can be predicted to have severe financial implications for the producer (Penny and Guise, 2000).

If the logic of SCAG business management is followed, the organization must spend money to generate moral outrage and harness moral outrage to collect more money. One campaign success is needed to fuel the next campaign. It is possible that some campaigns are either poorly thought out or pure lost leaders for the organization that is, they raise visibility but do not generate income. The April 2004 PeTA poster campaign which shows a young woman on one side, a "smiling" pig on the other, and a slogan: Neither of us is meat; is a reference to the case of alleged serial killer Robert Pickton on charges he killed 15 women on his farm in Port Coquitlam, B.C. (CTV, 2004). It is hard to imagine that this campaign could have been designed to recruit yet uncommitted but sympathetic citizens.

Many discussions on animal welfare regulation have focused on the lack of objective science to clearly demonstrate that one method of production is superior to another method. The focus on the science basis for animal welfare standards may in fact be missing the yet unresolved point.

Regulation, that is law compelling certain human behaviour and prohibiting others, is not based purely on science but on a need to protect human welfare. Science is one of the major tools used to measure the potential for human injury if free enterprise or other forces were to run amok. The major question to be answered in the next few years is:

Are people significantly injured by the way animals are raised to provide food for human consumption?

If the answer to that question is yes, people are injured by the presence of production systems that they consider inhumane, and the magnitude of that injury due to the presence of those systems is a non-trivial injury, then governments will be compelled to draft regulatory frameworks that protect the public from that harm.

Well funded and well organized SCAGs can produce effective and convincing rhetoric. There is evidence that the general public will believe a “negative-spin” story originating with a special interest group over an accurate and balanced story from an unbiased source (Hayes et al., 2002). As in all social movements there is a range of proponents within the animal welfare community from the law abiding to those committed to violent direct action. In the near future those who strongly believe that there are serious moral concerns related to animal welfare will be frustrated working through the legislative channels. Anti-intensive livestock farming has had some success with initiating regulatory intervention in the area of environmental protection, where there is some possible link to human injury. This success is unlikely to be repeated in the area of pure animal welfare. One only has to look to the recent extreme slow movement of Bill C-22 the proposed amendment to Criminal Code cruelty of animals’ provisions, for an example of how the legislative process is inadequate or at best extremely slow to address rational concerned debate on the issue of animal welfare.

BIO-TERRORISM

If an individual (or SCAG) truly believes for example that sows are better dead than in gestation stalls and chickens are better dead than in cage-layer confinement then the logical course of direct action is clear. Any social cause activist group that claims in it’s literature a desire to “To inflict economic damage to those who profit from the misery and exploitation of animals” (ALF, 2004) should not be treated as trivial considering the previous range of targets (ALF, 2002). Bio-terrorism and the threat of purposeful introduction of foreign animal disease is a real risk for our livestock industries.

CONCLUSIONS

There are a variety of possible policy options that could be pursued to deal with the farm animal welfare issue. All policy decisions are derived from moralization of the issue at hand; that is the electorate come to believe that the public good is served by government intervention.

Bennett outlined three policy options to achieve a balance between the production of livestock products and farm animal welfare that would represent the wants of society (Bennett, 1997a):

1. Use market mechanisms along with government intervention to supply information primarily via a registered method of production label program, to verify animal welfare and alternatives to standard production products that would allow people to make informed choices about what they consume. Bennett previously argued that the Consumer is in fact unable to make a free choice at the checkout counter when the decision in individual purchase is confounded by simultaneous competing concerns (Bennett, 1995; 1996). If animal welfare is a public good, and welfare policy is restricted to the market forces, vegans are disenfranchised as they are prevented from democratic participation in policies that are limited to the marketplace. The WTO has clearly indicated that this sort of method of production labeling is not supported in international trade negotiations (Hobbs et al., 2002; Kerr, 1999).
2. Government could regulate the production of livestock products through legislation or codes of practice to ensure that the wants of all citizens who are concerned with animal well-being are considered. Regulation has at least two regressive costs for society. Firstly, the cost of licensing a large farm is the same as a small farm and cost of new programs works against survival of small operations. Secondly if food costs increase incrementally due to new regulations, the future cost of food represents a greater proportion of income for poor people than for the wealthy representing an unfair burden of public policy.
3. Government could tax producers who cause the poor welfare and/or subsidize those producing goods that are thought to result in good animal welfare. (Bennett, 1997a). For example, if a tax or subsidy were applied to egg production so that free range eggs were of equal or lower price than standard production eggs, fewer “cage eggs” might be sold or produced (Bennett, 1997a).

Ultimately, Bennett (1997b) argued that legislation enforcing minimum standards combined with subsidy payments as incentives would be the best policy approach. This author is working from the European model which has a long history of government support to animal agriculture.

Future market forces may play an increasing role as demonstrated by the Freedom Food success in the UK (Appleby and Hughes, 1997). Supermarkets and large single desk buyers such as McDonalds can influence how farm animals are treated. One UK chain has adopted the RSPCA’s “Freedom Food” label and markets standard production and free range eggs at the same price despite the decreased profit to the store and producer (Appleby and Hughes, 1997). In Canada, the development and increasing market share of cost focused retailers such as Wal*Mart in the past five years would argue against the potential impact of method of production labeling programs on the majority of consumer choice decisions. The CFIA has recently initiated a consultative process intended to develop a verifiable system for method of production labeling in Canada (CFIA, 2005).

In a democratic society, the public expects to have its opinions count. The public in considering the complex processes in agriculture and food processing are likely to approach political questions posed, using significantly different parameters than current regulatory

structures are prepared to include. Considering societal trends; it may be prudent if decision makers in livestock production methods were to take into consideration or at minimum acknowledge factors other than science in a long term vision of sustainable and ethically supportable agricultural production systems.

Over time, consumers will probably express a clear opinion on genetically modified products and technology such as food irradiation as critical scientific assessment has been made and is possible in these areas. The same consumers likely will conclude that some forms of livestock production although scientifically defensible are unnecessary or not reflective of societal values and those citizens will support regulatory intervention to address those concerns. As regulatory bodies currently claim a sound science base for decision making, more discussion is needed on how society will make decisions in the face of scientific uncertainty in food production or in the case of animal welfare, in the face of moral conviction. In highly contentious issues there will be some science on both sides of the argument and the final policy decision will be based on ethics (Weaver and Morris, 2004).

If the statement made by the late Harrison McCain in relation to GM potatoes “*We are in the business of giving our customers what they want.....*” is representative of food processing industries, it is unlikely that significant science or ethically based leadership in animal welfare or similar issues in food production will originate in that quadrant.

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