

Getting to the meat of animal welfare issues

May 7 2014, by What Are Australian Consumers' Key Concerns About How Livestock Are Treated, And How Much Are They Willing To Pay For 'ethica

What are Australian consumers' key concerns about how livestock are treated, and how much are they willing to pay for 'ethically produced' meats? How will consumer values influence livestock industry and food retailer decisions, and ultimately impact what is available on supermarket shelves in the future?

These and other social and economic issues are the focus of a new, three-year research [project](#) now underway at the University of Adelaide in partnership with industry leaders, retailers and government.

Funded by the Australian Research Council, the project is led by two University of Adelaide chief investigators: history and ethics expert Professor Rachel Ankeny in the School of History and Politics, and economist and food policy specialist Associate Professor Wendy Umberger, Director of Global Food Studies.

"What we're hoping to achieve from this project is a greater dialogue between consumers and producers," says Associate Professor Umberger.

"What people know and expect regarding [animal welfare](#), and an understanding of how that influences consumers' purchases of animal products at the supermarket, is critical to our study.

"This research will be all-encompassing, taking a whole-of-chain approach from paddock to plate. We'll examine people's actual

purchasing behaviours and link that with information about their animal welfare beliefs. This will provide an understanding of not just what they buy, but how and why.

"We hope this work will help to better inform producers and consumers about each other's perspective on animal welfare, and enable them both to make choices that will have sustainable benefits for animal welfare," Associate Professor Umberger says.

Professor Ankeny says: "We're interested in what the average person thinks, and how they behave.

"One of the things we'll be considering is whether there's a need for improved labelling that integrates method of production with animal welfare outcomes. Many labelling categories are largely unregulated, and the definition of these categories can be very broad," she says.

Elders Ltd, Coles supermarkets, and Richard Gunner's Fine Meats are all industry partners on this project, as well as SARDI, a division of Primary Industries and Regions SA.

"We couldn't do this research without one of the major retailers, and we're pleased that Coles has been so willing to be a partner on this project," Professor Ankeny says.

Elders National Livestock Manager, Chris Howie, says: "Elders' business is driven by promoting best practice sale and transport of livestock, ensuring the best outcome for animal, producer and customer. This project is a fundamental step in educating the wider community about decisions made at each stage of the production chain.

"Addressing the disjoin between city and country communities' understanding of the Australian [livestock industry](#), which has occurred

over the last 20 years, is key to creating informed opinion," Mr Howie says.

Richard Gunner, Managing Director of Gunner's Fine Meats and Feast! Fine Foods, says his company is passionate about ethically produced, quality meat.

"It's important to us to be involved in this research project because it has the potential to shape industry and consumer understanding, attitudes and behaviour. In our opinion, being a leading producer means having a commitment to ethical production," Mr Gunner says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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