

# More animal welfare or more environmental protection: Which is the better goal?

October 24 2023

---



The team (left to right) in hygienic protective clothing with piglets: Prof. Dr. Monika Hartmann, Jeanette Klink-Lehmann and Milan Tatic at the Frankenforst Campus in Vinxel in the Siebengebirge region. Credit: Volker Lannert/University of Bonn

Which sustainability goals do people in Germany find more important:

Animal welfare? Or environmental protection? Human health is another one of these competing sustainability goals.

A team of researchers from the Department of Agricultural and Food Market Research at the University of Bonn have now found that consumers surveyed in their [study](#) would rather pay more for salami with an "antibiotic-free" label than for salami with an "open barn" label that indicates that the product promotes [animal welfare](#). The results have now been published in the journal "Q Open."

The [animal husbandry](#) sector faces a complex set of challenges as a result of various competing interests. "Sustainability goals such as [animal welfare](#), [environmental protection](#) and [human health](#) can quickly conflict with one another," says Jeanette Klink-Lehmann from the Department of Agricultural and Food Market Research at the Institute for Food and Resource Economics at the University of Bonn.

At the same time, stricter standards in animal husbandry could have an impact on competitiveness because it is not always possible to compensate for any associated increases in costs with higher consumer prices. This can threaten the viability of family-run farms and also impact rural communities.

"In order to develop appropriate policy conditions, it is vital to investigate and clarify these conflicts in the sustainability debate," says Prof. Monika Hartmann, Head of the Department of Agricultural and Food Market Research at the University of Bonn.

A team from the Department of Agricultural and Food Market Research at the University of Bonn investigated consumer preferences for various different sustainability goals. Their study focused on three main conflicts between animal welfare and environmental protection, human health and [animal health](#) and finally human health and animal welfare.

The research team analyzed the consumer preferences for these conflicting sustainability goals.

They also investigated how positive information on safeguarding certain goals and information on potential conflicts can influence these preferences.

Psychographic (e.g., the level of awareness for the environment, health and animal welfare) and socio-demographic factors (such as the sex and age of the participants) were taken into account in the analyses in order to explain possible differences between the preferences expressed by consumers.

In this experimental study, one group of participants were provided with information on the advantages of the pig husbandry practices associated with two fictitious labels: the "open barn" label promoting animal welfare and the "antibiotic-free" label that helps protect human health. A second group not only received this information but were also given information on potential negative effects of the production practices. A third group—which served as a [control group](#)—was only provided with information on the University of Bonn.

A daily trip to the supermarket was then simulated and participants were asked to choose between two different salami products in three different scenarios, whereby the salami products each represented different sustainability goals. The willingness of consumers to pay for the chosen salami was also analyzed in each case.

The team of researchers discovered that most people chose a salami with a sustainability label and were also willing to pay more for it. However, the participants were more willing to pay for a salami with the "antibiotic-free" label than for a salami with the "open barn" label.

"The results show that personal health is more important to people than animal welfare," says Jeanette Klink-Lehmann. The study also demonstrated that animal welfare considerations were more important to people than environmental protection. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that people's willingness to choose a more sustainable alternative is highly dependent on the price.

The researchers at the University of Bonn demonstrated that the extent to which information has an effect is dependent on which sustainability aspects are being considered and how the information is presented.

"We were surprised to discover that if consumers were only provided with positive information, the willingness to pay more for 'open barn' salami in comparison to the 'no label' salami increased but this was not true for 'antibiotic-free' salami," says Jeanette Klink-Lehmann.

The lead author has interpreted this to mean that although consumers perceive the "antibiotic-free" animal product as being beneficial for their own health, this advantage is sufficiently communicated by the label itself and additional information has no influence on consumer preferences.

In contrast, the team believes that consumers might be less aware of the positive effects of "open barn" production on animal welfare. In this case, the positive information provided to consumers improved their level of knowledge and thus their willingness to pay more for salami with the "open barn" label.

To ensure full transparency, it was important to inform consumers not only about the benefits but also the potential disadvantages of a production method. "However, our results suggest that such a strategy comes at a price," says Milan Tatic, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Agricultural and Food Market Research at the University

of Bonn. The team believes that two-sided information has a neutralizing effect.

"This means that we were unable to detect any positive influence on the willingness of consumers to pay more for a particular product in comparison to the control group when the positive information was paired with information on potential negative effects of the production method."

"The results demonstrate that those participants who place importance on animal welfare and human health were willing to pay more for 'open barn' salami," says Prof. Hartmann, who is a member of the transdisciplinary research area "Sustainable Futures" at the University of Bonn alongside her co-author Jeanette Klink-Lehmann. Furthermore, the study showed that health-conscious people were willing to pay more for 'antibiotic-free' salami in comparison to a 'no label' variety.

"Surprisingly, the latter is also true for those people who place particular importance on animal welfare," according to Prof. Hartmann.

The paper is [published](#) in the journal *Q Open*.

**More information:** Jeanette Klink-Lehmann et al, Sustainability trade-offs in animal husbandry: consumers' choice when they can't have it all, *Q Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/qopen/qoad025](https://doi.org/10.1093/qopen/qoad025)

Provided by University of Bonn

Citation: More animal welfare or more environmental protection: Which is the better goal? (2023, October 24) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-animal-welfare-environmental-goal.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.