The public, animal production diseases and policy; what lessons can be learnt from consumer research?


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Why public perceptions matter

- The sustainability of a production systems also includes how acceptable they are to stakeholders, including the public.

- The public are becoming more concerned about how the food they eat is produced.

- **However**, they are also becoming less familiar with modern food production.

- A greater understanding of societal expectations can lead to greater trust.
Systematic reviews

- Two separate systematic reviews were conducted:
  - Willingness-to-pay (WTP) meta-analysis (n=54)
  - Attitudes narrative review (n=80)

- Protocols were published online prior to reviews commencing

- Four databases were searched for each review using a combination of pre-specified key words

- Results were screened in a two stage process

Meta-analysis results

• A research gap was identified in relation to interventions to address production diseases

• A small, positive premium was found for higher welfare products. This varied by subgroup;
  – Western and Southern Europe had a higher WTP than Northern Europe and the UK
  – Highest for beef cattle, dairy cattle and layer hens and lowest for pigs
  – Consumers had a higher WTP than citizens (both were positive)

Clark et al (2017). Food Policy, 68, pp.112-127
Thematic analysis results

• Again a research gap was identified in relation to attitudes towards production diseases

• Consumers mostly view modern production systems negatively and voice a number of concerns
  – Naturalness and humane treatment were central to this

• The majority of concerns were also motivated by human health
  – e.g. the use of antibiotics was associated with food safety

• Sociodemographic characteristics were again important

Thematic analysis results

- Consumers have a number of coping mechanisms to enable them to eat meat
  - A number of barriers to purchasing higher welfare products were identified

- Consumers associated higher welfare/animal friendly products with improved product quality, safety and healthiness

- Both reviews support the use of legislative and market based solutions for improving farm animal welfare

European Consumer Survey

- 2,330 were collected across the 5 countries and 3 survey versions

- Questions were asked in relation to a range of topics

- Descriptive statistics were obtained and Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA used to establish cross-country differences

- Exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modelling was used to explore the relationship between latent variables
Results

▪ The majority of participants were unfamiliar with modern farming methods

▪ Animal production systems with a greater level of intensification were not viewed favourably

▪ All stakeholders were perceived as responsible
Results

- The greatest concerns were related to antibiotic usage and resistance and food safety

- In relation to the disease mitigation strategies presented:
  - *Doing nothing* was consistently disagreed with
  - More proactive interventions were the most preferred, such as those to do with housing and enhanced hygiene
  - Those that involved medicines, vaccination and feed supplementation were least preferred
Conclusions

- The public have very little knowledge about modern production systems
  - Including where the products they eat come from
- Natural and proactive interventions are preferred
- The use of more reactive and “treatment-based” interventions were viewed as less acceptable.
  - Reassurances should be provided when used
Conclusions continued

- Stakeholders need to be more proactive in terms of the information they are providing to the public.
  - This may help with miscommunication and increased trust

- Case studies/practice changes that would create public good will should be identified and communicated

- Independent assurance is important and stakeholders should be identified who could carry out this role.
  - Greater communication of existing relationships
Thank you!

Any questions?
Further reading


