

Discursive features of animal agriculture advocates

by

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## **Abstract**

The general public is more generationally and geographically removed from agricultural production today than ever before, yet as influential as ever with regards to its ability to impact the operating conditions of the animal agriculture industry. To date, the agriculture industry has focused research and extension on how to educate and persuade the public in order to gain support for its practices and policies. Little work has investigated how the language choices of those communicating about agriculture may be functioning to position themselves and other participants with regards to authority and credibility, and how this affects their communication and the industry as a whole.

This study sought to develop an understanding as to how three key groups in the animal agriculture conversation (experts, professional communicators, and agricultural advocates) use discourse and language to position themselves and other participants, their explanations of opposition to animal agriculture, and their ideas about how to best present and justify their arguments to the wider public. In addition to this, the study also sought to understand what power structures and dynamics exist within the conversation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data for a critical discourse analysis.

The discursive practices of the participants functioned to ultimately undermine and delegitimize the role of the public and individuals and groups opposed to animal agriculture, as well as position the industry and its constituents as the only authoritative and credible voices in the animal agriculture conversation. This is likely to be prohibitive to achieving the goals of agricultural communication activities. Those communicating on behalf of the animal agriculture industry should become more aware of how their beliefs, values, and ideologies impact the discourse from which they are operating, as well as how their communication is functioning.

This research was undertaken from a critical inquiry perspective, shedding light on some of the power structures inherent between the animal agriculture industry and the general public. Others undertaking agricultural sociology and related research should consider doing so integrating a similar theoretical perspective to continually challenge the assumptions and conditions under which the industry operates.

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# Chapter One

## Overview of the problem

“The customer is always right” is a motto which rings true for many industries, and when the customer, or general public as a whole, want something changed, markets respond by introducing the changes necessary to meet the demand, with varying economic and social repercussions. In some cases, changes are introduced by governments. Generally, impacts are absorbed and over time the market stabilizes again. However, a growing social awareness about animal production has seen the agricultural industry faced with demands to change its operating procedures to improve animal welfare in ways which in some instances, according to the industry, are less productive, less economical, challenge the sustainability of the industry, and do not actually improve animal welfare (Potard, 2015). While major food market constituents like McDonald’s and Wal-Mart have already introduced changes to how their suppliers can operate (Mench, 2003; 2008), the agricultural industry is focusing research efforts on understanding why the public is concerned with animal welfare in animal production, and how such concerns can be managed through communication and education activities in an effort to stop further changes. This study seeks to shift the research field’s focus from investigating what influences the public’s concerns and behaviors, to better understand how the discourse within which agricultural communicators operate shapes their communication and how they seek to influence the public to maintain their authority on the topic of animal welfare.

## Introduction

Food is one of the few things that affects and connects all people regardless of their race, age, gender, socioeconomic status, or geographical location (Whitaker and Dyer, 2000); everyone interacts with food every day. Aside from providing nutrition essential to maintain life,



food has deep roots with tradition, culture, social values, and beliefs (Murcott, 1982); food is deeply personal to many people. Everyone is a stakeholder of the agricultural and food production industry, and accordingly has a right to participate in conversations about food production.

In addition to being deeply personal to most people, food has many different meanings to different people. To some, it is a means to gain nutrition and maintain life, whereas for others it can impact their quality of life through dietary requirements. Food can fulfill not just physiological needs, but psychological ones too (Murcott, 1982). It is not surprising then that discussions about food production often become dynamic and contentious conversations. Conflicting viewpoints on how food is produced, including the use of science and technology, and the morality and ethics involved, have become dominant themes in such conversations. The animal agriculture industry is not immune to such discussions, from whether animals should be used by humans at all (i.e., animal rights), to specific practices and technologies used (e.g. intensive production, surgical procedures) (Croney, Apley, Capper, Mench & Priest, 2012).

While many people have opinions about animal agriculture, the same cannot be said for knowledge. Growing urbanization during the development of Western civilization through the past century has seen the number of people directly involved with agricultural production consistently decline (Satterthwaite, McGranahan & Tacoli, 2010). In the United States, the number of people working in agriculture declined from 41% in 1900 to less than 2% in 2007 (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2015). A similar trend has been observed in other Western societies, such as Australia where the percent of the population involved in agriculture has declined from 14% in 1901 to around 1% in 2011 (National Farmers Federation, 2012). Furthermore, both countries have experienced increases in immigrant populations, with 12.9% of

the United States population and 26% of the Australian population having been born overseas as of 2010 and 2011, respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013; United States Census Bureau, 2012). Anecdotal evidence indicates that while most people used to have an extended family member or friend involved in agricultural production, this is no longer the case. A 2011 consumer survey (n=1,006) issued by Meat and Livestock Australia found that 59% of people under the age of 35 had never been to a sheep or cattle farm (Pollinate, 2011). Today, the North American people are both geographically and generationally removed from agricultural production.

As the public continues to become geographically and generationally removed from agriculture and food production, interest in the industry is growing. One study found that two thirds of people under the age of 35 have little to no understanding of the red meat industry, but 58% wanted to know more about how beef and lamb are produced (Pollinate, 2011). The growing interest in food production can be seen in the popularity of food-themed entertainment such as festivals, websites, and television shows. The “Food Network” television network even has programming in more than 150 countries, including 24-hour networks in several countries (Foodnetwork.com, 2016). Although the growing interest is encouraging, with farmers ranking as the 5<sup>th</sup> most trusted professional group in the United States (GFK Verein, 2014), a visible disconnect still remains between the wider public and the agricultural sector.

In the past, specific incidents relating to farm animal welfare have sparked public debates, and the frequency of incidents and subsequent conversations appears to be increasing (Potard, 2015). The growing prevalence of food safety, environmental, and animal welfare concerns are leading to a number of today's consumers becoming increasingly conscious about their food and fiber choices (Appleby, 1999; Pollan, 2006). More people are expressing concerns

about agricultural issues such as farm animal welfare and are demanding more sustainable ways of livestock farming (Boogaard, Bock, Oosting & Wiskerke, 2011b). Intensive livestock farming, chemical use, and invasive surgical procedures without pain relief are among the top issues. These concerns and ensuing conversations are taking place in predominantly western societies (Seamer, 1998), where prosperity has led to food supply exceeding demand, and as such has created demand-driven economies where meeting consumers' preferences is the key goal of exchange (Vanhonacker, Verbeke, Van Poucke & Tuytens, 2007). These preferences are increasingly being influenced by post-materialistic values such as animal welfare (Vanhonacker et al., 2007). This is true for many parts of the United States, where economic and physical security are not of major concern (Inglehart, 2000).

Critical perceptions of, confusion surrounding, and conversations about animal agriculture and farm animal welfare have been driven by the frequent use of the term “factory farming” in public discourse over the past half century (Fraser, 2001b; Potard, 2015). The term “factory farming” was coined in 1964 by Ruth Harrison in her book *Animal Machines* (Harrison, 1964), which documented production animal husbandry practices such as dehorning, castration, and beak trimming, and suggested that modern agriculture was “irresponsible, unsustainable, unpalatable, and unsafe” (Croney et al., 2012 p. 1570). The book had a major impact on the awareness of intensive animal production among the British public and led to the British government commissioning the first report into the welfare of intensively farmed animals, commonly referred to as the *Brambell Report* (Brambell, 1965). Following the report, the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Committee was created to monitor the animal agriculture industry (replaced by the Farm Animal Welfare Council in 1979, which was replaced by the Farm Animal

Welfare Committee in 2011). The *Brambell Report* developed the Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare, a set of standards that has since been adopted internationally.

Since the release of *Animal Machines*, interest groups in support of, and against, animal agriculture have been advocating their position on animal production and animal welfare to the wider public, but no clear authoritative voice has been established (Potard, 2015). Organizations opposing the industry have engaged various tactics to elicit public support against husbandry practices, production systems, and the industry as a whole (Munro, 2005). Consequently, the animal agriculture industry has on occasion altered its operating practices, or at least committed to doing so, to appease organizational complaints and public concerns. In 2004, the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) called on the Australian Wool Industry (AWI) to immediately ban the practice of mulesing, a surgical procedure which removes wool-bearing skin from the tail and breech area of lambs to prevent fly strike (Lee & Fisher, 2007). The procedure was at the time commonly performed without pain relief. In response to PETA's campaign, which threatened an international boycott of Australian wool should mulesing continue, the AWI publicly committed to phasing out the practice by 2010 (McLachlan & Pietsch, 2005). While considerable achievements have been made in genetics, pain relief, and new technology, this target has not been met and the practice still exists in 2016, though at a lower prevalence.

On other occasions, changes to industry operating conditions have been driven through government policy and regulatory framework. In 2008, voters in California, United States, voted in support of the California Prevention of Farm Animal Cruelty Act (Proposition 2), a bill that called for changes to legislation, specifically that egg-laying hens, calves, and pigs have enough room to stand up, lie down, turn around and extend their limbs (Lovvorn & Perry, 2008). The

legislation effectively outlawed the use of battery cages, and the sale of eggs produced in battery cages from other states also was prohibited. The legislation was to be enforced on January 1, 2015, giving producers 6 years to make the necessary changes to infrastructure and certification practices. The egg production industry opposed the introduction of the legislation, stating that such changes would increase the cost of production, and thus the cost of eggs for consumers, and risk the sustainability of the industry while not improving animal welfare (Fard, 2008; McKinley, 2008). A post-implementation analysis found that Californian consumers are now paying \$0.48 to \$1.08 more per dozen eggs and the legislation changes have resulted in a reduction of consumer surplus between \$400 million and \$850 million per annum. (Malone & Lusk, 2015).

Market decisions by the food and retail sectors also have resulted in significant changes to the animal agriculture industry; most recently fast-food chain McDonalds committed to phasing out the use of eggs produced from caged hens in its USA and Canada stores during the next decade (McDonalds, 2015). McDonalds purchases more than 2 billion eggs annually in the USA (McDonalds, 2015); 99.8 billion eggs were produced in the USA in 2014 (USDA, 2015). A shift to cage free eggs was not the first time McDonalds had committed to changing its purchasing choices; earlier in 2015 McDonalds announced plans to “only source chicken raised without antibiotics important to human medicine by 2017 and to offer milk jugs of low-fat white milk and fat-free chocolate milk from cows that have not been treated with rBST, an artificial growth hormone,” citing that “animal welfare has always been important to us and our customers” (McDonalds, 2015, para. 5).

Whether driven by industry, government, or market, animal welfare assurance has become a key deliverable of the industry expected by the public. The format, requirements, and

accountability of different programs are highly variable not only between countries, but amongst different industries within countries (Fraser, 2006). Requirements to meet physiological indicators of welfare as indicated by health and growth are supported by scientific evidence, while those addressing pain, stress, and psychological indicators of welfare have less scientific evidence to support the sometimes significant changes to existing practices required, but are becoming increasingly popular with the public (Fraser, 2006). A recent report from the Australian Farm Institute stated:

“...there is a growing risk that fragmented and opposing views on the matter (of farm animal welfare) will influence policies in unpredictable ways, and that this will result in Australian livestock industries being rendered uncompetitive, while at the same time resulting in little real improvement in farm animal welfare standards.” (Potard, 2015 p.1).”

Though written in reference to Australia, this concept also is applicable to the United States, where the majority of changes to animal agriculture are being driven by forces outside of the industry rather than being initiated from within the industry.

As the disconnect between consumers and the food production industry has grown throughout the past century, so too has the importance of agricultural communication. The field was initially developed to extend technical information from scientists, as well as practical information, to farmers (Boone, Meisenbach, & Tucker, 2000). However, community engagement and education have become major focus areas of the field as multiple segments of the industry have become targets for public debates, including the use of genetic modification technology, water use, land rights, and environmental damage/protection issues. Traditionally information about animal agriculture extended to the public came from uncontested authoritative

figures such as scientists and academics, with extension organizations linked to tertiary institutions being the main location for information dissemination (Boone et al., 2000). Over time, industry lobby groups, organizations, and businesses have created roles for communication staff to focus on community engagement. In recent years, a new major group of communicators has entered the agricultural communication space; farmers, ranchers, industry employees, and those in support of the industry, are commonly referred to as “agricultural advocates” and “agvocates” (Agriculture More Than Ever, 2016).

The increase in agricultural advocates can be partially attributed to the advent and growth of social media (Myers, Irlbeck, Graybill-Leonard & Doefert, 2011). Historically, information was transferred to the public through mass communication, whereas social media has allowed the creation of masses of communicators. Where mass communication allows for messaging to be controlled by authoritative figures in terms of the agenda set and framing of issues (McCombs, 2004), social media on the other hand is unregulated. In the past, conversations about animal agriculture primarily took place between the animal agriculture industry and other organizations, which relied upon the media to share their message to the wider public who could not easily participate in the conversation. Today, anyone with means to access the internet can share their message with the world and become more participatory in public discussions (Anderson-Wilk, 2009). Consequently, there has been a proliferation of voices engaging in conversations about animal agriculture, ranging on a continuum of those in support of the industry to those opposed to it. Individuals can take political, scientific, commercial, and ethical positions on a single issue (Cook, 2004) which has resulted in different participants having different ways of speaking about the same topic; different groups use different discourses depending on what position they are

taking on the issue. A heteroglossia of conflicting discourses can create confusion and misunderstandings (Cook, 2004) and lead to conflict when social goods are at stake (Gee, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

With the population of people involved in agriculture decreasing, so too has the agricultural literacy of the public (Saunders, 2002; Specht, McKim & Rutherford, 2014). As the public's opinion of agriculture can be so influential on the industry and its operating conditions, it is imperative that the public be critical of the information they receive, especially from those with a vested interest. It is just as important for agricultural communicators to be critical of the information they disseminate and understand how their experiences, beliefs, values, and principles impact their language choices consequently shape their communication; is the discourse from within which they operate creating barriers in communication? Communicators may believe they present information about animal agriculture as though their language were indeed a transparent glass, sharing the "truth" about animal agriculture (Cook, 2004). However, it is important not to focus just on what is being said, but the ways in which communicators, through their choice of words and other linguistic techniques, position their audience, their peers, and themselves to maintain and legitimize their authority on the topic.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The goal of this project is to develop an understanding as to how three key groups in the animal agriculture conversation (experts, professional communicators, and agricultural advocates) use discourse and language to position themselves and other participants, their explanations of opposition to animal agriculture, and their ideas about how to best present and justify their arguments to the wider public. In addition to this, the study also seeks to understand what power structures and dynamics exist within the conversation.

The following research questions will guide the study:



- **RQ 1:** How are the three groups using discourse to enact and depict the identities of each themselves, the other groups in the study, and the other participants in the conversation?
- **RQ2:** What power dynamics exist within the animal agriculture conversation, how is power constituted, and how is discourse functioning to enable this?
- **RQ3:** How does each group use language to explain opposition to animal agriculture from other participants in the conversation, and how does this work to reify power dynamics?
- **RQ4:** How does each group use language to argue and justify their authority as it relates to the practice of agricultural communication?

## **Summary**

The animal agriculture conversation consists of a heteroglossia of voices competing for a position of authority on the topic of animal welfare. The public has the ability to significantly influence the operating conditions of the animal agriculture industry through government and regulatory framework, and market decisions. The practice of agricultural communication is a key component of the industry's attempt in managing the growing public concern about welfare in animal agriculture. To date, no work has been produced to understand how the discourse within which the agricultural communication industry operates, is functioning to aid communicators in maintaining and reproducing their authority on the topic. This research aims to understand how discourse not only influences power dynamics between the industry and the public, but also between different groups within the industry. The purpose of this research is to provide a critical reflection on the practices of agricultural communicators, and initiate a paradigm shift about the way language and discourse is understood.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Introduction**

The following chapter will build upon the context-development of the research problem. First the evolution of animal agriculture will be briefly visited to recount the circumstances which have led to the public becoming concerned about present-day animal agriculture. Then, literature relating to the field's attempt to understand and mitigate public concern is reviewed. Finally, the concept of using a linguistic analysis to investigate the research topic is discussed.

### **The evolution of animal agriculture**

The domestication of animals began about 10,000 years ago in the Neolithic era, along with the cultivation of plants. Animals are considered domesticated when: “they are kept for a distinct purpose, humans control their breeding, their survival depends on humans, and they develop traits that are not found in the wild.” (DeMello, 2012, p.84). Cattle, sheep, and goats were among the first livestock to be domesticated for human consumption. Some time later cattle became a dual purpose animal, being used for transportation and draft work along with horses.

Before the 1800s, agricultural production in the United States took the form of subsistence farming. Subsistence farming (also referred to as subsistence agriculture) is defined as: “farming or a system of farming that provides all or almost all the goods required by the farm family usually without any significant surplus for sale” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.). Subsistence farming was adequate for the time, with about 70 percent of the population living and working on farms (Boone et al., 2000). There were several factors over the course of the 1800s that contributed to the “agricultural revolution” that saw subsistence farming shift to commercial farming (where a surplus of products were produced to be traded and sold). These factors included: the expansion of agricultural land farmed with the settlement of the west, the

industrial revolution and mechanization of agricultural equipment, the demand for produce from growing cities, the expansion of the railroad system and refrigeration technology, and the 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act.

The invention of the reaper by Cyrus McCormick in 1831 is commonly referred to as the starting point of commercial agriculture (Conkin, 2008). McCormick's automatic reaper allowed two-and-a-half hectares of wheat to be harvested per day, which had been previously limited to less than one hectare per day using a hand sickle (hand-held blade) (Conkin, 2008). A period of rapid development of other mechanized farm tools followed, increasing the efficiency of both crop and livestock production (Conkin, 2008; Post, 1997).

The expansion of the railroad system meant that livestock could be raised in one location and fed and butchered in another. The addition of refrigerated railroad cars meant that perishable products, including meat, were able to be transported long distances (Aduddell & Cain, 1981). Farmers were no longer restricted to producing that what could be consumed by the population in their local region; food preservation and transportation opened up new markets across the country.

The 1862 Morrill Land-Grant College Act provided land grants to states in order to establish agricultural colleges. The purpose of land-grant colleges was to "to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts" (Morrill Act, 1862). Shortly after, the Hatch Act of 1877 was enacted and land-grant colleges were funded to develop agricultural experiment stations to further research (Boone et al., 2006). As a result of dedicated resources for scientific research, by 1900 all states had developed experiment stations and great gains in production efficiency and yields were being made (Boone et al., 2006). As the west was settled, the American population grew from 5.3 million in 1800 to 76.2 million in 1900, a 1300%

increase that mostly occurred in cities (United States Census Bureau, 2002). With more farm land under production, using new equipment technologies and research, farmers were able to produce a surplus of food to supply themselves and the growing population.

### **Changes to animal agriculture**

As the demand for animal products (meat, milk, and eggs) continued to grow, the animal agriculture industry sought ways to increase production and efficiency. Significant advances in understanding nutrition, breeding, genetics, and health were made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Vaccines were developed as preventative medicine for a range of endemic diseases such as tetanus, pneumonia, leptospirosis, and the clostridial diseases. Medicines, including penicillin, antibiotics, and anti-inflammatories were developed to treat a range of infectious and non-infectious diseases. Analgesics also were developed for pain relief. The use of medicinal technologies not only reduced livestock mortality from illness, but improved animal health, which in turn affected animal production; healthy animals have improved conception and reproduction rates, feed consumption and nutrient conversion efficiency, yield and product quality.

An understanding of the role of nutrition, and the value and availability of different feed stuffs was one contributing factor for the industry moving from extensive grazing systems to intensive feeding systems. Government subsidies for grain production resulted in a systemic surplus of corn and soybeans, which became a standard livestock feed ingredient (feed stuff). High-energy and high-protein feed stuffs were used to achieve faster growth rates, meaning a higher turnover of animals produced in a shorter time period. Feed and water additives were developed to promote digestive efficiency; low-value feed stuffs (with low digestibility) could become more digestible and have a higher amount nutrients utilized by livestock with the

addition of additives and supplements. The use of antibiotics in livestock feed, and implantation of hormone growth promotants began in the 1950s and still remain a popular option for increasing feed efficiency and growth rates in livestock (Bretschneider, Elizalde, & Pérez, 2008; Stewart, 2013).

There were two main outcomes from the move to using a predominately feed-stuff based diet (compared to grazing); livestock could be grown and finished all year round, no longer restricted by the seasonality of pasture growth, and; livestock could be raised and fed in numbers much higher than what a pasture-raised system could support. The amount of livestock raised on extensive pasture grazing systems is limited to the carrying capacity of the land; the environment can only sustain a certain population of species without becoming degraded. Feeding livestock crop products and by-products meant that more livestock could be raised on less land, and so came the evolution of intensive production systems, also referred to as confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). Intensive production systems for cattle generally occur outside in “feedlots” where cattle are grouped together in pens, and intensive poultry and swine operations are generally housed indoors. Poultry and swine are more susceptible to weather extremities and disease, with indoor housing allowing for a more controlled environment. Benefits of indoor housing for livestock include protection from weather and predators, as well as barriers to disease through on-farm biosecurity measures (Porkcares.org, 2016). For livestock raised intensively outdoors, different geographical locations require the addition of shade and windbreaks so that animals can seek shelter from the heat and cold.

Changes to animal husbandry also occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the act of branding cattle and horses for identification of ownership can be traced back to Egyptian times (Khan & Mufti, 2007), the use of tags in cattle, sheep, and goats developed as a secondary and temporary

identification means. The application of an identification tag involves piercing an animal's ear with a plastic tag using special applicators. While the castration of male animals is another procedure that has a long history, the prevalence of the practice has increased with commercial agriculture. Male livestock, particularly cattle, produce hormones that affect carcass composition and meat quality; castrated livestock are preferred for their superior carcass attributes, and often have a more docile temperament (Seideman, Cross, Oltjen, & Schanbacher, 1982).

Furthermore, castration is a method of genetic and reproductive control by physically stopping specific animals from reproducing. The surgical procedure of spaying (female castration) became popular with cattle who were no longer required for reproductive purposes; spayed cows gain weight faster than non-spayed cows. Spaying is also a method of birth control for cattle on extensive production systems who are not ready for market; cows can be spayed and turned out to pasture with bulls with no risk of falling pregnant.

Horn management includes tipping (trimming), and removing the horn bud (dehorning) (American Veterinary Medicine Association, 2015a). There are various procedures to tip and dehorn cattle. The primary reason behind dehorning cattle is to prevent damage to livestock, other animals, and people (American Veterinary Medicine Association, 2015a).

In sheep, common procedures include shearing (removal of wool by clipping) and crutching (removing of wool around the breech area by clipping). Mulesing is surgical procedure which removes wool-bearing skin from the tail and breech area of lambs to prevent fly strike (Lee & Fisher, 2007). Beak trimming in poultry involves the removal of part of both the top and bottom beak, and is a preventative management strategy to reduce the occurrence of injuries caused by cannibalism and bullying among hens (Henderson, Barton, Wolfenden, Higgins, Higgins, Kuenzel, & Hargis, 2009). In swine production, teeth clipping, tail docking and

castration are standard practice, with the latter done to preserve meat quality, similar as done with beef cattle (American Veterinary Medicine Association, 2015b). Teeth clipping and tail docking are performed to reduce the chance of injury caused by the natural biting behavior in pigs (American Veterinary Medicine Association, 2015b). Tail docking is also regularly practiced in dairy cattle production as a measure to improve hygiene on the udder (Tucker, Fraser, & Weary, 2001). There are several more practices and procedures used in the animal agriculture industry with varying implementation rates and different techniques across the world.

By manipulating the production environment, livestock can be raised for slaughter more efficiently, resulting in a higher turnover of products with less losses to illness and injury. While the major change to animal production in the 20<sup>th</sup> century revolved around the shift to intensive production systems, many of the nutrition, reproduction, and husbandry technologies developed are used today in extensive, or “free range”, production systems also.

### **The public’s concern with animal production**

The animal agriculture industry has experienced a significant rate of change during the past 200 years. In addition to new production systems and technologies since 1900, the agricultural workforce has decreased by 95% (Dimitri, 2005). As the urban population has increased, ties to the agricultural industry have decreased. Not only is the majority of the public physically removed from agricultural production by distance, they are generationally removed also. Throughout this transition, the public has not remained engaged and informed about the evolution of the industry; today an overwhelming majority of the public has very little understanding of, and experience with, agricultural production. As such, misunderstanding and misconceptions about production are common throughout the community. Animal activists with an agenda to end animal production seek to inform the public as to how cruel animal agriculture

is, as well as how harmful to the environment. In both the retail and food service industry, companies have taken public stands against the use of particular production systems or technologies to gain a marketing edge.

There are multiple voices, with different agendas, telling the public how and what to think about animal agriculture. There are many factors that influence an individual's perception of animal welfare, leading to a diverse range of perceptions existing within the wider public. At one end of the spectrum, there are traditional perceptions of animal agriculture; the agrarian ideal that reveres a harmonious relationship between farming families and their livestock; and the pastoralist ideal that reveres diligent animal care (Fraser, 2001a). As animal production has become more modern and technical, the public's perception has moved toward the other end of the spectrum; they have become critical and confused due to oversimplified, emotive, and contradicting arguments from different interest groups (Fraser 2001a).

Generally, in Western society, the public tends to evaluate the current state of animal welfare as problematic and not satisfactory (Coleman, 2007; Maria, 2006; Vanhonacker, Verbeke, Van Poucke & Tuytens, 2008). In the 2007 Eurobarometer survey, 77% of Europeans (n= 29,152) stated that they believe there is a need for further improvements (to animal welfare) to be made in their country (Eurobarometer, 2007). Coleman, Hay, and Toukhasti (2005), reported that 60% of respondents in Australia (n=1,061) agreed with the statement that "Welfare of animals is a major concern," and 71% agreed that "Farm animal welfare is an important consideration." Almost 50% of participants in a recent USA survey (n=2,005) stated that they were concerned about the humane treatment of farm animals (Center for Food Integrity, 2014). When asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement "US meat is derived from



humanely treated animals,” only 24% strongly agreed, while 76% of participants responded in the low to moderate agreement categories.

Fraser (2001b) describes the public’s “New Perception” of animal agriculture as “1) detrimental to animal welfare, 2) controlled by corporate interests, 3) motivated by profit rather than by traditional animal care values, 4) causing increased world hunger, 5) producing unhealthy food, and 6) harming the environment” (p. 634).

## **Approaches to understanding and mitigating the public’s concern with animal agriculture**

### **Concept of animal welfare**

Before agricultural communicators can attempt to understand and mitigate the public’s concern with the welfare component of animal agriculture, an understanding of the concept of animal welfare is needed, especially as interpretations of the concept of animal welfare differ among various stakeholder groups (Fisher 2009; Hewson 2003; Vanhonacker et al., 2008). Those involved with animal production from an economic and commercial standpoint tend to view and measure animal welfare using objective, scientific, quantifiable, physiological and behavioral parameters (Bracke, De Greef & Hopster, 2005). Others, who are involved in animal production from a non-scientific and/ or non-expert perspective, tend to interpret the concept from a more subjective perspective (Lassen, Sandoe & Forkman, 2006; Verbeke, 2009), often including psychological parameters as measurement forms. Seamer (1998) defined animal welfare as “a state of animal well-being which flourishes when physiological and psychological requirements are met continuously and adverse factors are controlled or absent” (p.203). The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) developed the following definition of animal welfare:

Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if as indicated by scientific evidence it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behavior, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress. Good animal welfare

requires disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate shelter, management, nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter/killing. Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal; the treatment that an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment. (International Office of Epizootics, 2015, article 7.7.1).

The concept of animal welfare is at times confused with the closely related concepts of animal health, animal cruelty, and animal rights. Animal health is defined as “the branch of medicine that concerns itself with the study, prevention, and treatment of animals, especially domesticated ones.” (Macquarie Dictionary, 2003, as cited in Potard, 2015). Animal cruelty refers to “the behavior of human beings towards the animal, rather than the state or feelings of the animal itself.” (Potard, 2015, p. 6). Cruelty is defined as “to inflict suffering; (to be) indifferent to, or taking pleasure in, the pain or distress of another” (Macquarie Dictionary, 2003, as cited in Potard, 2015). The concept of animal rights refers to the “moral or legal entitlements attributed to animals, usually because of the complexity of their cognitive, emotional, and social lives or their capacity to experience physical or emotional pain or pleasure.” (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2013). The relationship between animal welfare, health, and cruelty are clear; the presence of good health and an absence of cruelty contribute to positive animal welfare. The role of animal rights is the most debated, as an individual’s moral and ethical perspective on the use of animals and whether they ought to have “rights” influences their understanding and perspective of animal welfare.

### **Factors influencing perceptions of farm animal welfare**

The concept of animal welfare, and its importance, varies considerably around the world. Development, economic status, political stability, education, and culture are but a few examples of why some countries have a high interest in animal welfare, and other countries place a higher interest on human rights and welfare (Preece, 1999). Post-materialistic values have gradually

become more prominent in prosperous, industrialized societies who do not face issues of hunger and economic instability. In such societies, people's needs have shifted from survival to belonging, self-expression, autonomy, and a participant role in society (Inglehart, 2000). However, an intergenerational divide of values still exists within such societies; Inglehart (2000) found that in older age groups (pre-war), materialists outnumbered post-materialists fourteen to one, whereas the proportion of materialists to post-materialists declined significantly among young (post-war) people, showing that the influence of a person's early environment can influence their worldview and values throughout their life.

Post-materialistic values, such as animal welfare, often are prioritized even when they conflict with economic growth (Inglehart, 2000). This concept ties back to the idea of economic prosperity fostering post-materialistic values; improving economic growth is less urgent for those who are already prosperous. However, it is not just prosperous societies who value animal welfare; India has legal protection for animals that are not present in more prosperous societies, as well stating that "It shall be the duty of every citizen in India- (to) ... have compassion for living creatures". (Panjwani, 2004, p.147). A country's lack of prosperity may inhibit its ability to practice good animal welfare (e.g. improve infrastructure and fund veterinary care), but it does not impede its ability to value it (Fraser, 2006).

In countries where animal welfare is treated as an important issue, much research has been produced to understand what influences perceptions of animal welfare (Boogaard, Bock, Oosting, Wiskerke, & van der Zijpp 2011a; Boogaard et al., 2011b; Boogaard, Oosting, & Bock, 2006; Deemer & Labao, 2011; Kanis, Groen, & De Greef, 2003; Lassen et al., 2006; Maria, 2006; Van Poucke, Vanhonacker, Nijs, Braeckman, Verbeke & Tuyttens, 2006; Vanhonacker et al., 2007; Verbeke, 2009). From such studies, Te Velde, Aarts, and Van Woerkum (2002),

identified five key influencing factors on the conceptualization of animal welfare; convictions (a firmly held belief opinion), values (one's judgment of what is important), norms (translations of these values into standard rules of conduct), knowledge (information gained through experience, stories, and facts) and interests (economic, social and moral interests). Other studies have focused on the influence of demographic and socio-demographic factors (Herzog, Betchart & Pittman, 1991; Nibert 1994; Taylor & Signal, 2005), while Kendall, Lobao, and Sharp (2006), suggested that attitudes toward and perceptions of animal welfare reflect unquestioned customary relationships between people and animals as opposed to being formed from critical thinking, and that both socio-structural (socio-demographic) and individual factors influence attitudes and perceptions.

Kendall et al. (2006) identified three sets of factors as key structural determinants for attitudes about animal welfare: place-based urban rural factors; other social structural factors; and individuals' experiences with animals. As people with a rural background or experience in agriculture have a more utilitarian relationship with animals than people in urban areas, it was hypothesized that urban-rural place based factors would influence attitudes towards animal welfare. Specifically, it was hypothesized that people from rural areas would have a lower concern about animal welfare due to the utilitarian nature of their relationship. The results of that study supported the hypothesis, as well as indicating that people who grew up in non-rural, non-farm settings expressed greater concern for animal welfare.

An individuals' perceptions of farming and animal welfare also is influenced by factors such as where they live, their relation to agriculture, their knowledge, and their previous experiences. Boogaard et al., found that people who had a connection to agriculture and those who had had some involvement in agriculture had a more positive image of modern agriculture

and were more accepting of the trade-off between animals' naturalness (interaction with nature) and modernity (use of technology) (2011a). This idea was supported in a study by Van Poucke et al. (2006) who found people from rural areas were less critical of farm animal welfare relative to their urban counterparts, and Vanhonacker et al. (2007) also found that people with a higher degree of farming experience and people from rural areas held a low concern for animal welfare.

While studies have identified factors which influence perceptions of animal welfare, little work has been done to understand why these relationships occur. Furthermore, little explanation is provided as to what having a "low/er concern about animal welfare" actually means; does it mean that people have a low concern about the intrinsic value of animal welfare, or, do they have a low concern because they are knowledgeable about livestock production and are comfortable and confident with current practices, thus not needing to express "concern"? One would assume that those who have grown up in rural areas, and/or rely on animal utility for their income and livelihood would have a deep appreciation for the importance of animal welfare.

Research also has found that farmers and consumers have different perceptions of aspects of animal welfare due to the nature of their relationships and interactions with animals (Vanhonacker et al., 2008). In one study, farmers and consumers ranked most aspects of animal welfare with comparable importance, but encountered divergence upon the perception of present potential problems; consumers evaluated the ability to engage in natural behavior, access to sufficient space, pain, and stress more negatively than farmers. Overall, consumers were more concerned with the present state of animal welfare, whereas farmers evaluated the current state of animal welfare conditions as satisfactory. This is likely because farmers judge welfare by the health and performance of the animal, and if the animal is performing as required for economic utility, its welfare is considered sufficient (Vanhonacker et al., 2008), whereas consumers tend to

include emotive and psychological aspects to their evaluation.

The social structural factors influencing attitudes towards animal welfare determined by Kendall et al. (2006) included: gender, race, socio-economic class, education, age, and family status. Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated that women generally have a higher regard for the welfare of animals relative to men (Kendall et al., 2006; Nibert 1994; Peek, Bell, & Dunham, 1996; Peek, Dunham, & Dietz, 1997; Pifer, Shimizi, & Pifer, 1994). The relationship between gender, race, socio-economic class, education, and attitude toward animal welfare, whereby those lower in the stratification hierarchy are expected to have a greater concern for animal welfare, has been referred to as the “underdog hypothesis” (Kendall et al., 2006). Kendall et al. (2006) found some support for the underdog hypothesis, with women, black people, and those with lower education levels showing a greater concern for animal welfare. Conflicting results have been found in studies looking at the effect of income and education. Age was hypothesized to be inversely related to concern for animal welfare, and it was suggested that as a person’s circumstances change throughout life, such as family status and responsibility, concern would be directed away from animal welfare to concerns directly related to their lives, which was supported by the data.

The third and final structural determinant distinguished by Kendall et al. (2006) was an individual’s experiences with animals. Non-hunters, vegetarians, and those concerned about environmental issues were found to be more concerned with animal welfare. Again, it is difficult to interpret exactly what having “more concern for animal welfare” means, as it is reasonable to presume that people who hunt and those who consume meat are just as concerned with animal welfare, but perhaps more comfortable and thus less concerned about current practices.

Deemer and Lobao (2011) found support for the religious and political bases of farm

animal welfare attitudes in the United States. Higher dominion orientation (the belief of the superior status of humans over animals) was related to less concern for animal welfare, although it was found that religious beliefs could be a source of support for animal welfare. Boogaard et al. (2011b) found that respondents who believed in equality in human-animal relations were less prepared to accept modern farm practices, which could be interpreted as having more concern for animal welfare, thus supporting Deemer and Lobao's (2011) findings about dominion orientation.

Political orientation, as reflected by a desire for economic equality and a greater tolerance of out-groups (i.e. a more liberal orientation), also related to a higher concern for farm animal welfare (Deember & Lobao, 2011). Additionally, those with a greater concern for human welfare had a greater concern for animal welfare (Deember & Lobao, 2011). Further work in the Netherlands has shown that socially minded people (who value equality) had a stronger preference for more traditional and natural livestock farming and were less accepting of modern farming practices (Boogaard et al., 2011b), which could be connected to Deemer and Lobao's (2011) study that found that more politically liberal people (who also value equality) had a greater concern for animal welfare. Again, it is difficult to draw strong comparisons between the studies, but these results beg the question—are politically liberal citizens more concerned about animal welfare because of the modernity of today's agricultural production or because of the intrinsic value of animal welfare?

### **Public expectations of farm animal welfare**

Measuring and benchmarking of public attitudes toward, perceptions, and expectations of animal welfare has become standard practice in many countries and industries; when public expectations of animal welfare are known, animal agriculture industries can appropriately

identify and manage risk. With the exception of vegans, and vegetarians to an extent, research indicates that people believe that animals are a legitimate source of food and fiber (Te Velde et al., 2002). This is also supported by the increasing consumption patterns of meat, dairy, and egg products (Speedy, 2003). With regards to the use of animals for teaching, research, and testing, Williams, Dacre, and Elliot (2007) found that 70% of respondents in New Zealand (national representation, aged 16+,  $N=750$ ) agreed that it was acceptable on the condition that no unnecessary suffering was involved. Animal use for research into life-threatening and debilitating diseases were most justified, and research for safety-testing of cosmetics and household chemicals were least justified. The Center for Food Integrity (2014) asked respondents in the USA (national representation,  $n=2,005$ ) to rate their level of agreement with the statement: “If farm animals are treated decently and humanely, I have no problem consuming meat, milk and eggs,” to which 55% strongly agreed, and 41% moderately agreed. Coleman et al. (2005) found that 62% of respondents in Australia (random sample,  $n=1,061$ ) disagreed with the statement “Demand for food is more important than humane treatment.” In general, the public believes that animals should not be exposed to unnecessary pain or suffering (Coleman, 2007; Lassen et al., 2006; Vanhonacker et al., 2008).

It is beyond these shared beliefs though, as to how “humane treatment” is translated into animal production, that sees public expectations become divergent. The Five Animal Freedoms (Farm Animal Welfare Committee, 1979) are the most referred to and accepted principles of animal welfare (Potard, 2015) and are considered to be the minimum animal welfare expectations of the wider public in Western society. They are: 1) freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition; 2) appropriate comfort and shelter (often reworded as freedom from discomfort); 3) prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment of injury and diseases (often reworded as freedom



from pain, injury and disease); 4) freedom to display most normal patterns of behavior and; 5) freedom from fear (often reworded as freedom from fear and distress) (Farm Animal Welfare Committee, 1979).

The freedom for animals to move and the freedom to express natural behaviors appear to be expectations that consumers feel are not being met (Vanhonacker, Verbeke, Van Poucke, Buijs, & Tuyttens, 2009), and place a high importance on (Te Velde et al., 2002; Vanhonacker et al., 2008). Belgian citizens perceived current stocking densities and pen sizes across animal production to be inadequate, compared with other aspects of animal welfare (Vanhonacker et al., 2009). An expectation of animal production to be “natural” also has become evident through consumer research (Lassen et al., 2006). However, Lassen et al. (2006) found that some consumers were willing to accept practices that were unnatural, such as tail docking in piglets, if they were deemed necessary to prevent pain and other forms of suffering.

### **Public behaviors relating to farm animal welfare**

An individual’s attitudes toward, perceptions, and expectations of animal welfare influence their purchasing behavior; consumers who place high importance on animal welfare are more likely to purchase free-range/less intensively raised products, or those marketed as “animal welfare friendly” under quality assurance schemes, while those who are indifferent to animal welfare tend to be driven by price or quality attributes (Verbeke, 2009). Individual purchasing preferences have collectively driven the development of animal welfare marketing and the growth of the industry, which has influenced the animal agriculture industry through supply and demand dynamics; as the demand for welfare-friendly products grows, so does the prevalence of such production systems. However, there are other behaviors that can also influence the operations of the animal agriculture industry; signing a petition, voting, donating to

a charity, attending a rally, and writing letters are examples of public behaviors (Coleman et al., 2005). Public behaviors also have a collective nature to drive change and are often presented as calls-to-action by activist organizations. More often than not, public participation in such behaviors is limited to when they receive a call to action, and it is activist organizations who drive long-term campaign activities.

When the public perceives that their expectations of animal welfare are not being met, they are more likely to engage in public behaviors in an attempt to exercise social control. Following a television exposé on the cruel treatment of Australian cattle exported to Indonesia, activist organizations called upon the public to lobby for the end of the live export trade. Within two weeks of the program airing, Tiplady, Walsh, and Phillips (2013) surveyed members of the public (n=157) to investigate the public's response to the program. Less than 10% of those surveyed had contacted politicians or written to newspapers, and it was concluded that while the program affected the public emotionally, it did not translate into significant behavioral change (Tiplady et al., 2013). These findings are inconsistent with a review of public behaviors at that time. A petition launched following the program reached more than 250,000 signatures within 3 days ("GetUp Achievements," 2015). Members of both State and Federal Parliament received tens of thousands of emails on the issue, with the majority demanding the trade be banned. This was reported to be the most correspondence members of parliament (MPs) had ever received on any issue ("Live Export: 365 days," 2015). Nine days after the initial airing of the program, the Australian Federal Government suspended the trade to Indonesia. While the exposé may not have enacted significant long term behavioral changes in individual members of the public, the public behavior performed did translate into significant changes for the livestock export industry. A recent survey in the United States (national representation, n=2,005) found that 53% of

respondents strongly agreed with the statement: “I would support a law in my state to ensure the humane treatment of farm animals,” with 41% responding that they moderately agreed (Center for Food Integrity, 2014).

Public behaviors often are expressed in opposition to animal production, not in support, but this does not mean public behaviors should be discouraged. Wilkins (2005) says that the public should be encouraged to engage in food citizenship, which is defined as “the practice of engaging in food-related behaviors that support, rather than threaten, the development of a democratic, socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable food system.” (p. 269).

### **Citizen-Consumer Duality**

It has become apparent that the public has a certain ambivalence towards modern livestock production. While increased food safety, low food prices, convenience, and efficiency are welcomed by the public, exploitation of nature and loss of tradition are simultaneously rejected (Boogaard et al., 2011b). In turn, the purchasing behaviors exhibited by the public do not often reflect their attitude toward animal welfare and their associated public behaviors. Citizens may exhibit public behaviors, for example, signing a petition to support a ban on caged eggs or attending a rally to call for the removal of sow stalls from pork production, but in turn as a consumer, continue to purchase eggs produced in cages and pork produced using sow stalls. This discordance is referred to as the duality between consumer and citizen (Vanhonacker et al., 2008).

Experts may consider lay people’s perceptions of and behaviors toward livestock farming to be hypocritical, but their “reality” is just as real as those of experts (Boogaard et al., 2011a) and have the potential to influence the operating conditions of the animal agriculture industry.

There have already been increases in the regulatory framework under which the sector operates and the placement of constraints on the use of new or established practices and technologies (Parbery & Wilkinson 2012), with potential for this trend to continue.

The concept of animal welfare has different meaning to different people. Some people are highly concerned with animal welfare while others are indifferent. Those who are concerned with animal welfare are more likely to participate in public behaviors that can alter the operating conditions of the animal agriculture industry, but these behaviors are not necessarily reflected in their consumer purchasing behaviors. It remains that the public, some of whom have limited knowledge about farm animal welfare and some of whom have little desire to gain such knowledge, are a highly diverse stakeholder group with perceptions shaped by their knowledge, experiences, values, and convictions (Boogaard et al., 2011a).

### **Agricultural communication research**

The disconnect between the public and the agricultural industry poses a unique set of challenges and opportunities. It is becoming increasingly common for activists and detractors to capitalize on the public's perceptions of, and lack of knowledge about, the agricultural industry to influence government policy and market decisions. In an attempt to minimize the risk of the public's influence in ways that may negatively affect its sustainability and competitiveness, the agricultural industry has investigated ways to change the public's perceptions of the industry.

### **Persuasion vs. education**

Previous research efforts to change the public's perception have been grounded in both persuasion and education, but are ultimately aimed at changing beliefs that influence perception. Some scholars believe that providing dispassionate and factual information is the most effective method of educating the public, so that when debates do arise, all participants have a shared understanding of the issues (Coleman, 2010). However, Vanhonacker and Verbeke (2014)

concedes that “providing information and communicating about animal welfare will not automatically achieve the desired outcomes” (p. 160), as the public has limited practical knowledge of farm animal production and welfare, and not all consumers are interested in having such knowledge.

In contrast, other industry organizations have chosen to take the public relations route, promoting an oversimplified, positive image of animal agriculture (Fraser, 2001b). Producing oversimplified information can be misleading, and in addition with glossing over the ethical issues associated with animal production, can polarize the public (Fraser, 2001b). Furthermore, persuasion involves an adjustment in attitude, but not the transfer of knowledge, which may in turn work against the industry.

### **Social License and Trust**

To be able to influence the perceptions, attitudes, and subsequent behavior of an individual or group, there must first be trust between the parties involved (Sapp, Arnot, Fallon, Fleck, Soorholtz & Sutton-Vermeulen, 2009). In the past decade, research has shifted from the goal of persuading and educating the public to building trust in an effort to maintain the agricultural industry’s “social license to operate.” A social license is “the privilege of operating with minimal formalized restrictions (legislation, regulation, or market intervention) based on maintaining ‘public trust’ (Center for Food Integrity, 2014). Public trust is defined as “a belief the activities (of an individual or organization) are consistent with social expectations and the values of the public and other stakeholders” (Arnot, 2014). When the public no longer trusts an organization or industry, the social license is replaced with social control by means of legislation, regulation and compliance (Arnot, 2011). The introduction of social control is accompanied by higher operating costs, bureaucracy, and rigidity in the operating environment (Arnot, 2016), and

therefore it is within the best interests of the agricultural industry to maintain its social license.

The concept of maintaining a social license has been well established within the industry, with

Williams and Martins ((eds) 2011) stating that:

Farmers are increasingly expected to demonstrate their social and environmental responsibility as a pre-condition to being allowed to carry out their preferred farming and commercial practices [and that] Issues including climate variability, water scarcity, animal welfare, and declining biodiversity have led to increasing demands on farmers to conduct and communicate their farming practices so as to protect their “social license to farm.” (back cover)

Trust has been identified as a core component of social license. Research into building a consumer-trust model has been led by the Center for Food Integrity (CFI) in the United States.

The organization’s seminal work found that that shared values are three to five times more important to consumers than the demonstration of technical skills and competence in building trust (Sapp et al., 2009). That is, people don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

Since developing the initial model in 2009, the CFI has continued to develop the trust model, seeking to understand both barriers and opportunities to building trust. One focus of its research has been identifying which information messengers have the highest source credibility, influence on the public, and the relationship between source credibility, trust and influence. Messaging from the following three “voices” were tested in CFI’s 2014 research (Center for Food Integrity, 2014): Mom Scientist (a mother with scientific educational and/ or work experience); Federal Government Scientist (self-explanatory) and; Peer (a person who shares your interest in food). Overall, the mom scientist ranked as the most trusted source of information before and after the messaging was delivered to respondents, although scores for government scientists increased after respondents read the messaging (Center for Food Integrity,

2014). Trusted information sources included websites, family, friends, and television (Center for Food Integrity, 2014).

Barriers to building trust include cultural cognition and confirmation bias. The premise of cultural cognition is “the tendency of individuals to fit their perceptions of risk and related factual beliefs to their shared moral evaluations of putatively dangerous activities.” (Kahan, Jenkins-Smith, & Braman, 2011, p. 148). When faced with information about the risk of controversial matters, individuals will conform their beliefs to the group values of their cultural identities. Consequently, cultural cognition influences perceptions of source credibility; individuals are more likely to trust and give credit to sources who they believe share their worldview and values, and reject claims from those who they do not identify with (Earle & Cvetkovich, 1995; Kahan, Braman, Cohen, Gastil, & Slovic, 2010; Siegrist, Cvetkovic, & Roth, 2000).

Another identified barrier, confirmation bias, is the tendency of individuals to seek out and favor information that confirms their own pre-existing beliefs (Nickerson, 1998). This effect has been observed in both individual and group settings (Schulz-Hardt, Frey, Luthgens, & Moscovici, 2000). The selectivity of individuals when seeking out and processing information is a significant barrier to agricultural communicators.

The majority of agricultural communications research, and that being utilized from other fields (such as sociology and psychology), has a strong focus on understanding message characteristics as well as the characteristics of the audience. Little attention has been given to understanding the characteristics of the communicators, their use of language, and how their personal frames and biases are influencing their communication.

Traditionally, when dealing with agricultural controversies, the industry has engaged with the public from a position of defense. The shift to focusing on building trust and communicating using shared values has been encouraging, but the focus of research is still largely on the information receivers (i.e., public) and not on the information senders (i.e., communicators). To change the public's perception, the industry must first shift its own perceptions about how it engages with the public.

### **Linguistics and the agricultural discourse**

The function of language and the discourse used within the agricultural industry has been studied by scholars from the fields of sociology and english studies (Jepson, 2008; Swan & McCarthy, 2003; Stibbe, 2001; 2003). To date, the literature provides an overwhelmingly negative analysis of the agricultural, and wider animal industry, discourse, suggesting that operators within the industry use language to reproduce discourse that naturalizes the oppression and exploitation of animals (Bell, 2015; Jepson, 2008; Swan & McCarthy, 2003; Milstein, 2009; Moore, 2014; Stibbe, 2001; 2003).

The focus of this research largely has been on the impact of discourse on animals, particularly how those within the agricultural industry reproduce discourse to socially construct animals with the intention of maintaining their oppression. Little research has investigated how the language and discourse used by the industry is functioning to socially construct people within the animal agriculture debate, both those supporting the industry as well as those opposed to it. What work has been produced has not come through linguistic analysis, but through observation, such as Vanhonacker et al. who noted that people involved with animal production have a tendency to position themselves as knowledgeable and rational actors, while they dismiss the concerns of the lay person as emotional and uninformed (2007). Kendall et al. advised that such



assumptions also can polarize the public, who view their own perspective as ethically and morally motivated, and those within the industry as driven by economic gain (2006).

Cook, Pieri, and Robbins (2004) studied the discourse of three stakeholder groups (experts, non-experts, and outside advisers) within the genetically modified (GM) cropping industry to understand perceptions of non-expert knowledge and views, explanations of opposition to GM technology, and their ideas on how to communicate and justify their research to non-specialists. An analysis of the discourse revealed “rhetorical devices (were) used by scientists to characterize and ultimately undermine participation by non-experts in areas including rationality, knowledge, understanding and objectivity” (p. 433). Furthermore, scientists (treated as experts) were found to engage with the public “from their own linguistic and social domain, without reflexive confirmation of their own status as part of the public and the citizenry” (Cook et al., 2004, p. 433), which ultimately was reasoned by the author to be creating barriers in communication. While the results of Cook et. al. (2004) were not intended to be generalized across the animal agriculture industry, it is within reason to propose that individuals within the animal agriculture industry may be behaving in a similar manner, under the concept of naturalistic generalization (Stake & Trumbull, 1982). Naturalistic generalization refers to the potential applicability of qualitative research in a similar context (Stake & Trumbull, 1982) where “readers make choices based on their own intuitive understanding of the scene, rather than feeling as though the research report is instructing them what to do” (Tracey, 2010, p. 845).

Burr (1995, as cited in Stibbe, 2001) wrote that “language itself provides us with a way of structuring our experience of ourselves and the world” (p. 33). We use language to construct not only our own identities, but those of other beings around us, both human and non-human. Furthermore, language also creates categories for both enacting and recognizing identity (Butler,

1990). Therefore, language and the discourse that an individual, or industry, operates within affects how they make meaning of the world, and how they communicate that meaning.

While scholars have studied the discursive representation of animals within an agricultural context, it remains that no work has sought to understand how language is functioning within the agricultural discourse to construct the identities of participants in the animal agriculture conversation and influence power dynamics. In 2008, Croney and Reynnells urged the poultry industry to “objectively and aggressively evaluate the discourse of farm animal production to ensure that what is conveyed is accurate and intended” (p. 387), stating that industry communication is, at times, “obfuscating” and of ethical concern. It is just as important for those within the industry participating in the animal agriculture conversation, more often than not in a debate-style exchange, to be conscious of how their language choices may be functioning to position themselves and other participants with regards to authority, and how this affects their communication, and the industry as a whole. As Fairclough (2001) said, “consciousness is the first step towards emancipation.”

## Chapter Three

### Theoretical approach

#### Discourse

Discourse analysis is the “study of language-in-use” (Gee, 2010). However, the concept of discourse, what it encompasses, its function, and how it ought to be analyzed varies greatly among scholars, as Potter and Wetherell (1987) stated:

Perhaps the only thing all commentators agree on in this area is that terminological confusions abound... It is a field in which it is perfectly possible to have two books on discourse analysis with no overlap in content at all (p. 6).

Scollon and Wong Scollon also agree that “the term ‘discourse analysis’ is polysemic” (2001, p.538, as cited in Hogan, 2003). For the purpose of this study, the researcher is working with the understanding that discourse is “a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking and writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue” (Watson, 1994, p.113). To elaborate, Belsey (1980) defines discourse as:

...a domain of language-use, a particular way of talking (and writing and thinking). A discourse involves certain shared assumptions which appear in the formulations that characterize it. The discourse of common sense is quite distinct, for instance, from the discourse of modern physics, and some of the formulations of one may be expected to conflict with formulations of the other. Ideology is not inscribed in discourse in the sense that it is literally written or spoken in it; it is not a separate element which exists independently in some free-floating realm of “ideas” and is subsequently embodied in words, but a way of thinking, speaking, experiencing. (p. 5)

Perhaps the greatest division in understanding of discourse stems from differences in epistemological positions among analysts. Structuralists believe that language is a reflection of reality and the structures that maintain it, and language in turn works to reify said structures. Post-structuralists on the other hand, believe that language doesn’t just transparently reflect reality, but that language shapes and constructs reality, identity, and social norms, and also that

language influences what is able to be thought, said, and done (Georgaca & Avdi, 2012). In this study, the researcher is working from a social constructionist approach, where analysts believe that reality and identity are systematically constructed and maintained through systems of meaning and through social practices (Georgaca & Avdi, 2012). As such, the researcher believes that there is no objective truth which can be proven, as knowledge is continually mediated through social processes and existing structures.

### **Discourse and power**

The researcher intends on using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) to investigate how language may be being used to develop, maintain, and reproduce power structures amongst participants in the animal agriculture debate. Discourse analysts believe that language functions to construct reality, rather than mirror it, and that it can be used for social action; people use language to achieve certain goals (Georgaca & Avdi, 2012). Discourse is related to power in that “they make available certain versions of reality and personhood, while marginalizing alternative knowledges and associated practices” (Georgaca & Avdi, 2012, p. 148). The critical component of a discourse analysis seeks to identify how discourses are produced through institutional practices, which in turn legitimize and maintain those practices, as well as reproduce dominant ways of seeing the world. In this context, the researcher is seeking to identify both if and how different participants in the animal agriculture debate produce discourses which serve to legitimize and maintain their authority on the topic, by focusing on “common-sense” assumptions “which are implicit in the conventions according to which people interact linguistically, and of which people are not generally consciously aware” (Fairclough, 2001, p.2).

Language for particular groups becomes the norm, and is reproduced and naturalized over time to the point where individuals may not be consciously aware of the broader discourse from within they operate; analysts rely on the assumption that “individuals are both positioned by discourses (of which they may not be fully aware) and use them (though not intentionally)” (Georgaca & Avdi, 2012, p. 150). However, the researcher is working under the assumption that the language choices of research participants is indeed intentional, though the broader discourse from within which they operate may be a result of their social experiences. The researcher seeks to understand if and how participants from within the animal agriculture industry are using language to control what is able to be said, by whom, and with what authority. The researcher also intends to understand what viewpoints and positions the participant’s discourses are reproducing or challenging in order to maintain their power. From a sociological perspective, the researcher is seeking to answer the question of how “social order in general is produced and reproduced” (Cameron, 2001, p.48); that is, how are those within the animal agriculture industry producing and reproducing their authority?

The core principles of CDA as stated by Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p. 271-280) are:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action.

By using a CDA approach, the researcher will be asking questions such as; How is the text (talk) positioned or positioning? Whose interests are served by this positioning? Whose interests are negated? What are the consequences of this positioning?

## **Methodological Approach**

### **Research participants**

This study focused on three main voices in the animal agriculture debate: Scientists/ academics, Professional communicators, and Agricultural advocates. Participants met several selection criteria, including: location with the United States; support for the animal agriculture industry; level of communication activity, and; availability and willingness to participate.

**Scientists and academics:** Individuals who had leadership roles at universities with an animal agriculture program, including professors and veterinarians.

**Professional communicators:** Individuals who worked for large agricultural national organizations.

**Agricultural advocates:** Individuals who had a high profile on social media as measured by followers, subscribers, engagement, and frequency of posting.

The researcher used three respondents from the scientist and academics, and agricultural advocate categories, and four respondents from the professional communicators category (total 10 participants); discourse analyses often use a small sample size as analysis is labor intensive and large amounts of data is prohibitive (Georgaca & Avdi, 2012).

### **Data collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted and recorded through the use of an online calling software, Skype, with only the audio feature

used. All interviews were conducted through Skype for the sake of keeping the data collection environment and method consistent among participants.

Semi-structured interviews were used so that the researcher could prompt and guide the discussion to ensure key concepts were discussed, while still allowing for flexibility and discovery (Berg, 1998; Given, 2008). Interviews lasted around one hour, however the length did vary due to the nature of the discussion and participant's willingness. Interviews were ceased once the researcher believed data collection had reached saturation (Given, 2008).

### **Analytical procedures**

Data collected through the semi-structured interview process were transcribed into text. All identities of participants were replaced with a code name to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

The researcher analyzed the text both collectively, by interest group, and by individual case. Coding the data as a whole allowed the researcher to see similarities and differences among participants overall and gain a rudimentary understanding of the data. Comparing the data on a group level allowed the researcher to be able to explore possible similarities and differences among the groups within a more contextualized setting, which was important as the researcher believes that context contributes greatly to discourse (Gee, 2010). This was also true for analyzing individual transcripts. The process of decontextualizing text is important for coding data to generate themes and categories during analysis, however, Briggs cautions that coding can lead to the analyst "losing sight of the interpersonal factors that motivated the informant to produce just that response at just that moment" (1986, p.49, as cited in Cameron, 2001), and with that caution the researcher intended to remain cognizant of the data as a whole event. In addition to this, the author acknowledged that misinterpretation of texts is a potential issue, as "talk is

always designed by those who produce it for the context in which it occurs” (Cameron, 1991, p. 145).

The researcher sought to identify how the participants used discourse to position themselves and those about whom they spoke, including the use of jargon and assumptions. The researcher further sought to interpret the data in terms of language, ranging from themes, collocations, semantics, and syntax, to understand how each group used language to attempt to become gain or maintain power within the debate, if they did so at all.

The researcher practiced analytic memo writing, following the advice of Saldaña (2013): “whenever anything related to and significant about the coding or analysis of the data comes to mind, stop whatever you’re doing and write a memo about it immediately,” (p. 33). Analytic memo writing allowed the researcher to track her thought process, make note of emerging patterns in the data, and theorize connections among the data. The researcher also practiced “Talking shop” (Saldaña, 2013) whereby she discussed the data with supervising professors. Data analysis was an ongoing process which continued throughout the writing of analysis and discussion.

### **Researcher positioning and epistemological statement**

Acknowledging the epistemological framework that guides this research is an important consideration in this proposal. The researcher believes that knowledge is not absolute. One can be certain of “knowledge”, one can be confident it its probability, but one can never prove anything to be the absolute Truth. The researcher worked from the position that reality does not exist independent of the human experience, waiting to be “discovered”, but that individuals create their own unique realities.



The researcher acknowledges that her research has been, and will continue to be, shaped by her personal experiences. As someone who grew up in the city, as far removed from food production as possible, she is now a strong advocate for agriculture and often finds herself defending production practices debated by activists and the community. While she does not personally own livestock and may not be considered a ‘primary stakeholder’, she has witnessed first-hand the effect animal activist campaigns and negative media coverage can have on the industry, as well as the poor risk and crisis communication activities of the industry.

The researcher has become frustrated from watching the agriculture industry struggle to engage with the community about animal agriculture issues and the associated misconceptions. She is frustrated by how superficial and shallow communication efforts often are, and the focus on the use of narratives and persuasion rather than attempting to provide education and empower the consumer. The researcher is frustrated at watching the food service and retail sectors bow to community pressure, driving changes to industry production practices when industry should be driving those changes, if and when changes need to be made.

### **Ethics and trustworthiness**

The researcher has attempted thus far to be transparent with regards to her personal and academic background, subjectivity, epistemological, and theoretical positioning in this study. She hereby again acknowledges her own subjectivity which results from an intimate relationship with the research area; she has spent many years both working in and advocating for the animal agriculture industry. In addition, she further acknowledges that while she has been, and will continue to be aware of her own subjectivity, she can not promise that she will be aware of all subjectivities at any particular point in time; she anticipates that her subjectivity will evolve and

develop as she gains new experiences over time and is committed to maintaining her reflexivity.

In the words of Widdowson:

If you have the conviction and commitment, you will always find your witch. And to be critical about discourse is to be aware of this: to be aware of the essential instability of language and the necessary indeterminacy of all meaning which must always give rise to a plurality of possible interpretations of text (1998, p. 369).

The researcher will attempt to present her reasoning and conclusions as objectively as possible so that the reader can make their own inferences. However, by stating her own background and position, she is allowing the reader to understand how she has come to her reasoning and conclusions, which will always be affected by her subjectivity.

It is of importance, given her epistemological and theoretical perspective, to state that she did not code the data in an attempt to discover an absolute truth. In addition, she did not intend for the results of this study to be generalizable, however, she did suspect that similar results may be found if more subjects were to be studied.

### **Limitations of the study**

This study had 10 participants, which some people may consider to be too small a sample size. However, the purpose of this study was not to produce generalizable conclusions as possible with large sample sizes, but to conduct an in-depth and highly contextualised analysis. As such, saturation was a sufficient measure to determine sample size. The purpose of this research was to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of how discourse can function within the animal agriculture industry, and to challenge others to be more critical of their language choice, and that of their peers. In turn, the author hoped to encourage more reflexivity where “researchers continuously explore their own assumptions and how these shape their research activities, their interpretations, and the generation of knowledge” (Given, 2008, p. 6), and extend this definition toward all parties communicating in the animal agriculture debate.

Another limitation is exclusion of factors that may contribute to individual participant's discourse, including: race, age, gender, socio-economic status, education level, and previous experiences. For the purpose of this study, participants were analyzed based on their role within the industry. Should this work be developed in a dissertation, the inclusion of additional considering factors would be an appropriate adjustment to the experimental design.

This study was the researcher's first experience collecting qualitative data through interviews. While every measure was taken to ensure the data collection process was consistent, the researcher acknowledges that she became more confident and experienced with the interview process as data collection progressed. Consequently, the researcher may have been more effective in probing participants and initiating follow-up questions toward the end of the study.

Some of the participants knew the researcher in a professional capacity before the commencement of the study. This, in turn, may have led these participants to be more forthcoming with their responses, and the alternative is also true; participants who were unfamiliar with the researcher may have been reserved with their responses. Cameron (2001) discusses the idea of participants trying to "save face" by answering questions differently as to avoid embarrassment. It is also acknowledged that participants might adjust their answers to fit the "intentions and preconceptions [they see] behind the [researcher's] question" (Cameron, 2001, p. 148). However, the researcher is working under the assumption that the participants are answering honestly and truthfully at the time of questioning, and acknowledges that answers, perspectives, and positions may change over time dependent on context and audience.



## Chapter Four

### **Analysis**

The participants from the study used language to ultimately undermine and delegitimize the role of both the public, and individuals and groups opposed to animal agriculture, as well as position the industry and its constituents as authoritative and credible. Common themes exhibited in the discourse were motivation, authority, credibility, truth, and power.

Analysis of the data resulted in five major points of interest: 1) The relationship among motivation, authority, and credibility; 2) The relationship among truth, authority, and credibility; 3) The relationship between truth and power; 4) The social construction of the general public, and; 5) Explanations of opposition to animal agriculture. Some concepts will appear throughout the analysis. This is because the nuanced nature of the data, and the numerous functions of the discourse as a whole, as well as specific parts. For example, the concept of “truth” and how one comes to decide what is the truth, is interrelated with the concept of authority, credibility, and power.

No notable differences were found in language use among the three groups studied. Some participants from the Professional Communicators group appeared to be more reserved in their responses and deliberate in their choice of language used, which may be a reflection of their professional field and experience as a communicator.

### **The relationship among motivation, authority, and credibility**

The motivation behind an individual’s, group’s, or industry’s actions, as defined by the participants, was directly tied to whether or not the participants granted them credibility and authority on the topic of animal agriculture. Credibility, understood as the level of believability someone’s statements should be awarded, was granted to those whose motivations aligned with

the animal agriculture industry, i.e., individuals, groups and industries who support animal agriculture, such as farmers and ranchers, pro-industry lobby groups, and research institutions.

The motivation of supporting the animal agriculture industry was a binary concept in which support of animal agriculture resulted in the granting of credibility and authority, authority being understood in this context as the right to speak on the topic of animal agriculture. The converse is also true.

Interviewer (I): ... would it be a fair interpretation on my end to say that the authority ... has a connection to the motivations behind the communication? Whether or not somebody has the authority to speak on the topic?

Respondent (R): Yeeeeeah ... um ... let me think on that here for a second. Um. [Pause]. I would, I would say so, you know because the motivation for, you know, producers, is, we're, we are here to produce and to raise the healthiest pigs that we can, you know? ... you know we're all farmers, we all have that same, you know, agenda that, that's what we want to do, and when you look at organizations like the animal rights organizations, I mean their, their agenda is to, even though their website and all their written material will not say this, but their ultimate goal is to eliminate or greatly reduce animal agriculture, you know, and I guess when you see what's motivating them as far as donations, that sort of thing, um that's that their motivation and that's what they want to do.

The importance of an individual's motivation in determining credibility was extended to academic experts, as shown below. While academic experts who produced work to the benefit of the industry were regarded as credible, those who produced work that may not have reflected well on the industry and its practices were met with contention, and the assumption that they were deliberately manipulating their research to reflect poorly on the industry. The researcher acknowledges that there may be individuals and institutions producing research in any field to support their own agendas, but it is interesting to note that when an individual's perceived motivation does not align with the industry, they are essentially condemned and stripped of any authority.

R: ... on social media there are some people I do follow that are in academia, and I honestly, I'm like, I almost worship what they say, you know what I'm saying? Um I can think of one with animal agriculture ... loved listening to him and the way that he talked about animal agriculture and and the research and I just really, you know, just really enjoyed and really embraced what he had to say.

\*\*\* (change in quotation)

I: How would you describe your relationship as a professional communicator with academic experts?

R: I tell you, it's very strong with academic experts within the industry, and very contentious with academic experts outside of the industry.

I: Can you elaborate on what you mean by academic experts outside of the industry please?

R: So, um, you can have academic experts at ah institutions like ah, oh I don't know, you can have any academic experts who are working to provide information to try to make animal agriculture look bad just as you can have academic experts working on research to try to um, improve the industry, we come across both ... It goes back to really uh what their, what the motivation is. And uh, whether the motive is to try to improve the industry or whether the motive is to tear down an industry.

Credibility was not granted to individuals, groups and organizations whose motivations differed from, or did not align with, those of the animal agriculture industry. This is demonstrated in the following example, where the participant said she would not listen to one organization in particular because "they have a completely different agenda".

I: ... who do you think has the authority to speak on the topic of animal agriculture to the public?

R: Oh wow. Um, I would say definitely any, uh, producer organization ... because those are all made up of producers you know ... Um I would also listen to like your veterinarians ... Um, organizations that I would not listen to would be the Humane Society of the United States because they have a completely different agenda than what they lead themselves to have the people believe.

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I: Is there, would you say that there's anybody who shouldn't have the authority to be speaking to the public about animal agriculture?

R: I would maybe say activist groups.

I: And why would that be?

R: Um, I guess we all have an, when it comes down to it, activist groups, you know whoever they are, and however we define that internally, as well as us, we all have an agenda, right? They have an agenda and we have an agenda, but I think that our agenda comes from, our agenda comes from an agriculture community and those connections with farmers come from, because you know we have the experience, and I was working with farmers working with the animals, that to me is experience, um and not necessarily because someone told you so.

In the above quotation, the respondent acknowledged that both the group with whom she identifies with (professional communicators), and animal activists, have their own agenda in their activities and mission. However, as the respondent's agenda aligned with the agriculture community, and they were working *with* farmers, they granted themselves the authority to speak on the topic of animal agriculture. Authority was not granted to anyone whose motivations diverged from the animal agriculture industry, and other criteria which may influence their perceived authority and credibility, such as knowledge and experience, were not mentioned. Motivation and/or mission was the first and final criteria to determining authority for those who did not align themselves with the broader animal agriculture industry.

In the following quotation, another respondent states that animal activists should not be considered authoritative because they are trying to put the animal agriculture industry out of business. It is interesting to note the way the respondent refers to activists as "trying ... to put people out of business," as if that is the primary and sole goal of an activist. Animal activists, on the other hand, would argue that their goal is the liberation of animals, and improvement of the welfare of animals (Humane Society, 2016; PETA, 2016), and that changes to the animal agriculture industry are an indirect, but still significant, result of their mission (as the animal agriculture industry could not exist within a space where animals are truly liberated). This shows



that the respondent is working from the assumption that the focus of an animal activist is that of the farmers and ranchers, not the livestock. This discourse also works to make the mission of animal rights activists the moral problem, rather than the use of animals itself (Swan & McCarthy, 2003). This highlights that the two groups (those in support of the industry, and those fundamentally opposed to the use of animals) are co-existing and engaging in a dialogue, but with clearly different ideas on what the fundamental problem at hand actually is. It is also worth noting that in the following example, the perceived motivation of getting “people to stop eating meat,” is sufficient reason to deem that someone shouldn’t have the authority to speak on the topic of animal agriculture.

R: Well I think there's a lot of people who claim to be authoritative um who, who, who maybe shouldn't have the authority to speak, and I'm referring more in this case to the activist side it as opposed to the advocate side of, the people who are trying to put farmers and ranchers, people who raise livestock out of business.

I: ... would you be able to elaborate more about why they don't have the authority to speak on animal agriculture?

R: Because um they, I think it's a couple of things. One, is what is their motivation? And if their motivation is to get people to stop eating meat can we trust that their communications are going to be, ah that the goal, can we trust their motives I guess?

The participants used language to construct animal activists as financially motivated and dishonest, with an ultimate goal and/or hidden agenda of shutting down the animal agriculture industry, which resulted in them not being granted credibility and authority. As shown in the following quotations, the ethical and philosophical motivations of animal activists, which such organizations often identify themselves with, were not acknowledged. This, in turn, served to also construct animal activists as antagonists in the animal agriculture industry narrative. The researcher fully acknowledges that, as in any industry, the motivations, ethics, and morals of

individuals are on a spectrum, and as such there is likely to be some people driven by unethical motives, such as profit.

R: So if you have someone who is adamantly opposed to animal agriculture and talked about that, their sole priority, their end game is the complete closure or shut down of animal agriculture, so they promote a vegan society, um don't waste your breath engaging in a conversation with those individuals.

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R: Because I think that people can make money off of it, I think is one thing ... the activists have learned that they can go out and spin a message and a sob story to make money so that they have a job ... we have people who are trying to push a vegan agenda and they're trying to, to bring it out in a manner that makes it look like they have more of an issue with what's going on in agriculture rather than having the, they're trying to disguise their overarching mission of, of their vegan agenda or the abolishment of animal agriculture, with topics such as antibiotics or, such as animal welfare, environmental stewardship ...

The perceived financial and commercial motivations of the animal activist industry was linked to the participants as viewing the activist's as having a conflict of interest. The perceived conflict of interest served to further undermine and credibility and authority that the activists may have.

R: Because I think that people can make money off of it, I think is one thing. So I think that the activists have learned that they can go out and spin a message and a sob story to make money so that they have a job ...

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R: ... the only way that they survive or the only way they continue with the organization is to raise funds and their funds are donations ... Um so again they are a fundraising, you know mechanism, you know, more money goes into their pension plans than what goes into animal, local animal shelters, so you know, it's about greed, it's about you know, I hate to say it, it's actually to fund, you know their organizations, you know, their employees, and that's the only way they're able to do it ...

It is again interesting to note that the respondent is working from the assumption that the core mission of the activist organizations is to earn money, and not the liberation of animals.

This again serves to construct the moral problem as that of the activist's intentions, and not of animal welfare.

R: ... I think there's a very deliberate effort by some of the activist groups that say they do speak for animals ... appear like they're the only one speaking for the animals. But in fact they have quite a big profit motive also in terms of donations, to really amplify their cause ... there's also the activist industry which also has their financial motives as well ... they may be non-profit, but they don't lack a financial motive in these discussions. And especially in California I see that a lot where these activist groups are bringing in millions and millions of dollars um and yet they stand up and declare no conflict of interest at public hearings and it's like "in what world is that not a conflict of interest?"...

While the above example shows that the financial and commercial motivations of the activists were reason for the participants to withhold credibility, the same motivations of the animal agriculture industry were not tied to its authority and credibility with the same negative connotation. Only three participants acknowledged that the animal agriculture industry may face some skepticism due to the fact that the industry does profit off of the use of animals. However, in the example immediately below, the academic expert was referring to professional communicators having lost some credibility due to the nature of their job and their vested interest in the industry, but did not appear to consider themselves as having a vested interest in the industry. This was also observed with the other two academic experts interviewed. All three academics considered themselves to be independent of industry, with no vested interest in it.

R: Those that are employed you know, in, in working directly as you're describing, are uh not very effective and I think that's because the, uh, uh because of their affiliations, the uh general public does not take them seriously, it's sort of like, um they have a vested interest so therefore they've lost some credibility.

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R: I'm sure that there is some skepticism because um, you know, we profit from agriculture – we have to, because we have to put food on our table ... So I think as a society there probably is a little bit of skepticism because of that, because we, you know we, we're making our living off of agriculture.

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R: I think that there's healthy dose of skepticism when it comes to the view of professional communicators, and some of that is justified, I think people are, are concerned about spin, about being manipulated, about not necessarily being told the truth and being told the whole story ...

All references to anybody who's motivations did not align with the animal agriculture industry were negative. The ethical and moral motivations that activist organizations identify themselves with were implicitly deemed invalid by not being acknowledged. The idea that animal activists, or anybody opposed to any facet of animal agriculture, may identify with a different ideology, and as such hold different values and attitudes towards the use of animals, also was not acknowledged. The lack of acknowledgement served to delegitimize the views, values, and attitudes of activists.

### **The relationship among truth, authority and credibility**

The concept of truth was also tied to the determining who was granted authority and credibility on the topic of animal agriculture. Participants defined having hands on experience essential to know what the truth indeed was/to have the ability to determine what is right and "true." When hands-on experience was lacking however, the motivation of telling the "truth" and doing the "right thing" was substituted.

R: Sure, sure, um, I think farmers would be number one ["Who is best positioned to communicate about animal agriculture?"] because they can tell their story ... I think just people that are closest to actually raising the animals I think would be best, because you, you just have a better first-hand knowledge of raising those animals and I just think you're just more credible and you're more genuine, you're most authentic, you're more transparent when you work closest to it.

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R: Um, I, I, I think for that authority, you just really need to have that personal touch, you really need to be involved with the, you know with the raising the animal. Actually be a part of the industry, because I think you're the closest to that, um, industry as if you're out there actually doing the work, where someone who is may be living in New York City and has other motives ... it's hard for me to give them much credibility because

they're just not out here and, and you know, I don't know, I just think you really need to be actually out and actually doing the work, being right there ... that's the only variable, you really need to be actually involved in the industry.

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R: The first thing is you've got to know what's going on, you've got to have boots on the ground at the farm level. Um, I think that's the first and foremost, and you have to be communicating with producers. Uh you have to be able to, to do it yourself ...

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R: So farmers have the greater sense of credibility because of their direct engagement and contact with animals, ah university experts because of their level of expertise and the belief that they don't have a financial interest in the information, and veterinarians because of their technical level of expertise, their experience with animals and then the oath that they have taken to protect both animal and human health, so all of those things contribute to make those three specific groups very credible in terms of the conversation.

The absence of hands-on experience working in animal agriculture was deemed a quality that led to those with some level of opposition being deemed as being unreliable sources of information, as implicitly stated in the previous comments. However, some agricultural respondents acknowledged their own lack of hands-on experience in the industry but did not deem it to be a weakness in their credibility because their motivations were aligned with the animal agriculture industry, as shown in the example below.

R: Yep, I think I would be an excellent example. If I answered no [to the question "Do you think a person needs hands on experience to have credibility?"]], then I would say I'm not qualified because again I've not really done it in terms of hands-on um experience within the industry. It's been, you know, learning by watching and listening and reading and then applying, and yeah I really think the most important, it takes more good communications and public relations skills first and foremost and having the industry or subject matter expertise is a secondary...

Animal activists were singled out as being a group who should not be granted authority and credibility on the topic of animal agriculture because of their motivations, as discussed in the first part of this chapter. However, when speaking in reference to the connection between truth, authority, and credibility, participants suggested that anyone in a non-specialist capacity also

falls into that same group. The credibility of the data and rhetoric used by anyone with any level of opposition was tied to the perceived motivations of the individual, and/or their position on the topic. When scientific data were being used to advocate a position in opposition of the broader industry's agenda, the data were perceived as lacking credibility. Similarly, when someone may not be outright against animal agriculture, but voiced an unfavorable opinion about it, they lacked the experience and knowledge to deem that opinion being credible/ to be able to speak the "truth."

I: Do you think that there is anybody who doesn't have the authority to speak on animal agriculture to the public? Or shouldn't have the authority.

R: Oh yes ... obviously someone who only has um qualitative knowledge of what they think is best for animals, best for humans, best for the planet, um you know they may try to use their title or their notoriety to uh demonstrate to folks that they should be able to talk about a topic but if you dig deeper into their technical skills and expertise they are just not there ... chefs can talk about the quality of products ... Where they shouldn't be interjecting into the conversation, in my personal opinion, is when they start talking about "well antibiotics shouldn't be used" or "genetically modified feed ingredients", unless they have that background to truly understand why it is or is not good for, again, people, animals, the planet etc. ...

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I: What if those people had that criteria [experience] but they were in opposition to animal agriculture, do they still have the authority to speak on it to the public?

R: They have, um, yes, as long as they are truly representing the scientific knowledge that is out there. So for example, we have way too many individuals who do have the technical background on paper, but they're, they're not adhering to the scientific principles, the empirical formula that has withstood the test of time, for example when you have individuals with a scientific or technical background but they are holding up correlational studies as causation or reason to believe in one production model over another, they're violating the, in my opinion, the good of the society by not adhering to well-sounded, scientifically principled, applied, we don't confuse correlation with causation.

While having hands on experience and the "right motivations" was deemed necessary to be able to speak the "truth," empirical objectivity was used to determine what was actually

considered “true.” Empirical objectivity was emphasized as the most credible lens through which to view and discuss issues, and the value of using emotion and having a different belief about the use of animals was undermined. The use of the discourse of science, including references to “scientific knowledge,” “quantitative data,” “facts” and “evidence” was used to overrule competing discourses of emotion and philosophy (Stibbe, 2001). The animal agriculture industry was constructed as honest, truthful, and doing the “right thing” by using empirical objectivity, while the animal activists were constructed as deceptive, dishonest, and basing their rhetoric on emotion over facts.

R: Well I think you can't respond to them really in many cases, because uh you're, you're trying to use facts against emotional [unable to transcribe] and the, the facts um, don't ring true with emotions ...

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I: Do you think uh people in opposition to animal agriculture have any authority to speak on the topic?

R: Well, I uh, yes, they do of course, I um, when they, they have their knowledge and their opinions and sometimes where it falls short is that they use opinion, personal uh agendas and personal opinion in place of facts.

In the above example, the respondent speaks to the knowledge and opinions of people opposed to animal agriculture, as “*their*” knowledge and “*their*” opinions, distancing their own knowledge and opinions from that of the people in opposition. The use of “*their*” also appears to point out that that knowledge and those opinions are somehow different and insinuates they are not credible.

I: Do you think the authority changes when somebody perhaps doesn't agree with the industry or is speaking against the industry, or is it just kind of kind the criteria more experience and educational based?

R: I mean, I feel like they still have authority, but that's when you turn the conversation into a debate at that point though. There's a lot of uh, a lot of heart strings that are pulled when, when, on either side of the conversation, when you're talking about agriculture because of the passion involved on both sides ... But as I said, as a scientist backing their

information with scientific findings, I believe is important for industry to have at the front.

The above statement clearly undermines the views of people opposed to animal agriculture by stating that when they express their views, a conversation about animal agriculture shifts into a debate, as if it is not possible to have an informed discussion on such a topic without it being reduced to an argument with a winner and loser, a right and wrong. In addition to this, the respondent follows up by referencing “heart strings” being “pulled,” which implies that such a conversation cannot take place without being influenced by emotion, which would be a negative thing. The following statement also works to reduce the value of emotion in such conversations, by positioning it as less credible than the use of facts, again through using the discourse of science:

R: Well I think you can't respond to them really in many cases, because uh you're, you're trying to use facts against emotional [unable to transcribe] and the, the facts um, don't ring true with emotions ...

While the use of knowledge, facts, and data are all important in any aspect of decision making, it appears that the respondents disregarded the value of incorporating emotion into the decision making process. While respondents often mentioned how important it was to be making decisions that were supported by data, they did not acknowledge the positive role that emotion can play in influencing their own decision making process, with the exception of the previous statement referring to “heart strings” and “passion”.

Another concept which arose was how people within the industry could never succeed in trying to change the mind of an activist or someone fundamentally opposed to the use of animals for agriculture, which implied that competing beliefs were not based on “truth.” Failing to recognize the association between a person's views and beliefs in turn serves to undermine those beliefs. The respondents did, however, note the distinction between people who are



fundamentally opposed to the use of animals in agriculture and people who are opposed to specific ways in which animals are used in agriculture, but not the actual use of animals.

R: So if we were talking animal rights, the bottom line is, is that I'm not going to change anybody's mind, I mean none of us are going to change their mind because they are so ingrained in that value process that I really just don't feel like for the most part that we would have much success trying to change their mind. Um but what we can do is put out the facts, so if they're putting out incorrect facts, you know we just need to say "hey this is not right, this is not correct" ...

The idea of telling the "truth," and the existence of one truth was consistent throughout all of the interviews. The frequent references to the need to tell the "truth" acted to indirectly construct anything said in opposition to animal agriculture as not true, false, and/or misinformed. This, in turn, worked to reduce issues in animal agriculture as false and dramatized.

R: Well, so we live in a country of free speech, and I think it's important that we're, that we're able to have anybody say what they want, but on the flipside of that, it is frustrating, when people who really don't know what we do are out there telling people what we do ... we just have to be able to offer the truth ... so at least when those other people who don't have the experience say the wrong thing, at least maybe those consumers or those people that are listening will be able to say "Wait a minute, I heard a different version from an actual rancher one time" and I would like for us to have more credibility than those people that don't do this every single day.

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R: ... I really look at it more as a company or organization has to uh take actions and do the right thing and then professional communicators help tell the story, the true story.

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R: ... um that means that there's a big, a big void of information that can be exploited if we don't fill it with factual information ...

Participants also assumed that if they could share the "truth" about animal agriculture, as defined by empirical objectivity, and backed up by personal experience, the general public then would understand and comply with their views on the topic. This served to reinforce the idea that

there is only one real truth; the activist's had their truth, but the participants truth was indeed the "right" and "true" truth.

R: So the biggest challenge is because we do have activists out there and they are spreading misinformation ... so we just need to be able to get out there and make sure that uh that the truth is out there in the public as well and uh then they'll be able to make their own decisions.

Much of the conversation around the concept of truth involved statements directed at the alleged lack of truth practiced by opponents to animal agriculture and their associated dishonest tactics. However, acknowledgements of when the animal agriculture industry had fallen short of public expectations, or perhaps been in the wrong, were not present. While two participants noted their responsibility to address such events in the examples below, no references to specific events were made, as was no reference to any time when an animal activist, or any other individual's negative claims against the industry, may have been valid and justified. Not acknowledging when people in opposition had valid and justifiable arguments acts to further undermine their credibility and contribution to the topic of animal agriculture.

R: ... I think I qualify as expert, but I also advocate for agriculture ... but at the same time I point out where I think there are shortcomings.

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R: And what really ticks me off is that we try to change terminology and we try to create spin on, for positive things, when we need to say "hey this is wrong" and we need to call slaughter slaughter, not harvest, and we need to, you know, not we need to call beta-agonists a drug, not a feed ingredient, um because I think that when I think of professional communicators I think of bundling messaging and spinning topics ...

### **The relationship between truth and power**

The concept of people within the agricultural industry being on a mission to tell the "truth," or being engaged in some ongoing activity to tell the truth, appeared to reinforce the belief that they were doing the "right thing" in terms of participating in animal agriculture, of

which itself was never discussed during the interviews. What was discussed was how people ought to behave, think, and navigate their way through the animal agriculture industry and the issues within it. What was not discussed by the respondents was whether or not actually participating in animal agriculture was the “right” thing to do; it was implicit. The respondents did not question their participation in animal agriculture, working from the ideology that they were participating in an activity that was natural and inevitable. The constant references to telling the “truth” about animal agriculture in turn served to reinforce that they were indeed doing the “right thing”.

In turn, a “David and Goliath”-like battle was constructed between the animal agriculture industry and animal activists. The animal agriculture industry was constructed as time-poor, under-financed, and the under-dog in the battle to spread the “truth” about animal agriculture, whereas animal activists were constructed as well-financed and time-rich in their efforts. The notion that many people in animal agriculture have primary jobs not related to advocacy, such as caring for livestock and conducting research was emphasized, even though the industry also has dedicated professionals for the purpose of communications and related public relations activities.

R: ... unfortunately, um, when you have organizations like your HSUS [Humane Society of the United States] um there's no question that they have power ... they know how to work with companies to intimidate them ... they've got the money behind them ... I mean it's just crazy you know how much money they have behind them and so they're able to use that money and that influence to um talk with companies um and kind of, I mean I know I'm biased, don't get me wrong, but I feel like they bully a lot of the companies into making these changes ... and there's no basis behind that... those retail food companies should be looking at the experts which are your veterinarians, but instead they're listening to ... animal rights organizations and I just don't think that's right because they're not out here actually doing the work and they really don't have any basis for that other than their ultimate goal of reducing or eliminating animal agriculture.

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R: And so they're putting out misinformation and that helps fund their own groups, and so it's, I think it's difficult to find a totally disinterested group and the closest you do get

is the public sector scientists, but usually they're so busy writing grants and teaching classes that they really don't get involved in the public policy discussions and some of the more, you know, especially the toxic ones around animal welfare, so it leaves this void that gets filled by groups that have a special interest in it and unfortunately they're usually quite well funded and use social media very effectively to put out information that is plainly wrong and there's little voice out there to, correcting that information.

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R: Um but we're working to catch up and we're doing our best to try and get our voice out there but again we, our biggest disadvantage is that there's less than 2% [of the population] of us out there and of course not every farmer does what we do um because they're busy doing the work you know so that a huge challenge for us.

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R: ... they've got a lot of money behind them as well and so they're, they're able to put out really impressive looking uh messages that um that, you know really don't have a basis in fact or at least are skewing facts uh so it looks really good to the general public unfortunately, um so they come, often come across as the better communicator because they have really impressive uh looking materials.

There was an emphasis placed by many respondents on how time-poor and busy people in agriculture are, as they had to work in their primary position, whether it be as a farmer, researcher, or communicator. Note that when the respondents referred to the farmers, a strong emphasis was placed on how the farmer's job was to care for the animals and how hard they do work, to further establish their authority, credibility, as well as emphasize their positive values. It appeared that it was legitimate for the agriculture industry to use emotive rhetoric during communication, but not animal activists.

R: The problem is they seldom do because they're too busy working and don't recognize themselves as a spokesperson.

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R: That's an interesting question. So, you know, I think everybody that's working in academia is busy with their day job, and the farmers are busy with their day job, and everybody is busy doing their job, and so the only people that have time to do some of this are groups whose entire job is to put out information that is not correct, and I think that's a really hard thing to counter.

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R: ... I hear my colleagues when they say "You know what, my job is to teach, and to do research, and that's what I'm paid for and that's what I spend 60 hours a week doing, and I don't have time for the murky, toxic discussions and debates around some of these topics, so I choose not to participate there" and likewise the farmers have similar opinions it's like "Come on, I've already got a job, I'm a million miles away from civilization, I don't have time in my day to deal with that" ... the narrative is already written to some extent in terms of all animals in American agriculture are on big corporate farms and they're all nasty profit motive people ... so how do you counter that narrative? Whose job it is is a hard thing to say, because nobody trusts the industry so they can't speak up, but the activists are quite happy to speak up even though they're part of the activist industry, but if anyone that's involved in farming speaks up, "well you can't trust them because they're industry", and that's a really effective ploy that the activists have used to shut up anybody that works in agriculture and then if you also cast doubt around the public sector scientists and just suggest that they're paid shills, well then the only people left to speak up are the non-profits, how convenient for the non-profits. So I think that they try and play that card very effectively and if you take any funding from industry, you're instantly hated and can't speak, and that just leaves nobody left to speak out for it and that's a real problem.

In the above example, the participant appears resigned to the fact that the agriculture industry will not “win” against the “murky, toxic discussions and debates” surrounding animal agriculture, as “the narrative is already written.” They then list examples of how those in opposition seek to reduce the credibility and authority of those within the animal agriculture industry, finishing by saying there is “nobody left to speak out” on behalf of animal agriculture. Most participants agreed that the responsibility to advocate for agriculture was that of the farmers themselves, but also acknowledged that the farmers were often too busy doing their own jobs. The fact that the industry has a section of the workforce dedicated to agricultural communications, including tertiary study options, was not mentioned, but the existence of paid professionals in opposition to animal agriculture was highlighted, as shown in the example below.

R: So you know you've got groups with 100% paid people whose job it is to do that kind of thing, and then you've got everyone else who has day jobs trying to squeeze it in on the weekend and nights, and that's a really unfair fight ...

In addition to being constructed as the underdog, people within the industry were also constructed as virtuous through the references to their care of livestock “24 hours a day 7 days a week ... it doesn't matter if it's a holiday or vacation”.

R: The reason I think I have a lot of authority is because I'm living it, I'm living this 24 hours a day 7 days a week, we live this every day you know, it doesn't matter if we're sick, it doesn't matter if it's a holiday or vacation, you know we are out, out and taking care of those animals, um so like I said the issue is how do I get my voice out there, and that's the biggest challenge that us advocates have ... to get our voice out beyond that to consumers um is really hard and even to some of these retail companies you know we're just a small percentage of the population that it's a real challenge to get that voice out there.

Another concept raised, in addition to the industry being constrained by time and money, was that people within the agricultural industry are constrained by the truth, while implicitly suggesting that people outside of the industry do not face the same constraint. The concept of being constrained furthers the construction of those within the industry as an underdog.

R: ... what frustrates me is when they have to put out information that is not correct to support their viewpoints ... I've seen that, particularly with the GMO issue where groups will put out information that that's not backed up by data, that's blatantly inaccurate, to try to push their viewpoints and that I think, as a scientist, I'm constrained to actually telling the truth, in fact I mean that's pretty much all I have in terms of my scientific credibility, is the, and my job really, is to not be able to put out information that's incorrect, and it makes it a very one sided fight, when you've got one side that's constrained to the truth and the other side that can make stuff up.

The idea of people within the industry needing to be “empowered” was featured prominently throughout the interviews also, adding to the underdog construction. It further served to construct the lack of power within the industry as an obstacle, which is/was blocking the industry from achieving its goals; it was implicit that once the industry was “empowered”, it would be able to meet the challenges at hand.

R: ... my job is to help um farmers, and empower farmers to tell their story, not to tell their story for them, but to give those farmers the tools to tell their stories about their farms...

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R: Yeah I think it's just making sure and providing trainings and opportunities for producers and farmers to feel like they're empowered to go out and do that, so we need everyone. You know it can't be the shining star of the moment in whatever industry, we need to find a way to empower all of our producers, whether it's on a local level or on a national level just to help tell that story.

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R: um are all viewed as credible spokespeople when it comes to um animal agriculture issues that the public has an interest in knowing more about, so I don't think they necessarily look to professional communicators as the most credible source, uh I think we certainly can be but I think we can also do a good job empowering others, I think that's one of the most and relevant things that communicators can do, is not to just deliver messaging but to empower and support others who have a greater sense of credibility.

Only one participant made the association between farmers viewing themselves as “the victim” and the need to become “empowered,” shown below.

R: First of all, farmers need to stop thinking about themselves as victims, they're not victims in this, in this scenario. They need to feel empowered and they need to take control of, of communicating what they think is the right thing to communicate.

The way language was used when discussing authority, credibility and power resulted in an intriguing juxtaposition regarding the social construction of people within the animal agriculture industry. While those within the industry were definite in claiming the authoritative ground and credibility on the topic of animal agriculture, they very much saw themselves, as individuals, and the industry as a whole, as disempowered and marginalized. Furthermore, humans became the victim, specifically those within the animal agriculture industry, whereas those in opposition to animal agriculture operate from a discourse that positions the animals themselves as the victim.

## **The social construction of the general public**

The general public was constructed as confused, uneducated, and ignorant on the topic of animal agriculture, which worked to undermine the opinions of the public. The respondents appeared to be working from the assumption that if they explained their position and reasoning to the public, the public would in turn agree with them, which featured earlier in this analysis.

R: You're not going to change an activist's mind, they're just that, they are an activist. They, you, you will not convince them of a difference of opinion to their own, they're usually very discrete. Now, a common lay person, that has ... heard propaganda from activists, they believe it, those people you have a chance of communicating with, if you do it properly ... If you provide them with the right information, I have faith in humans that they make, that everyone can make good decisions if they have the proper information in front of them, so if you provide them with the proper information they'll make a well educated decision and a lot of them will understand what you do and and uh see that it's maybe not so bad and it's maybe not right in line with the propaganda that they've seen ...

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R: I'd say that a significant percentage of them are ignorant, that's not because they have not been educated, they have not had experience in any of these areas when it comes to understanding uh where their food comes from or how it's produced, what goes into its production. I think that um, most of the majority, there's some that have made up their minds that that are, those that are vegans and vegetarians have made up their mind they're not, they're not going to deal with animal agriculture – that it's a bad thing in many cases.

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R: ... the general public just wants permission to consume animal based protein, they desire meat, milk, and eggs ... We have to do a better job of, for lack of a better term, granting consumers permission to eat animal, to consume animal based protein, um in a comfortable manner where they don't feel guilty like if they are buying a steak, um they're allowing an animal to be mistreated simply so they can have that steak.

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R: So, they have lots of questions, they may have a tendency to fear what they don't know which is why it's so important that uh as we talked about the farmers and ranchers are there to answer their questions with accurate information.



In the above statement, the respondent constructs the public as not only uneducated, but irrational by referring to their fear of the unknown. They then in turn construct farmers and ranchers as somewhat of hero figures, who are there to “save” the public from making bad choices by being able to answer their questions. However, the respondents not only did not lay blame with the general public for their lack of knowledge on the topic of animal agriculture, but acknowledged their role in contributing to the situation.

R: Um, there's a big perception issue with animal agriculture, I think within our um amongst our consumers, and I don't think a blame can be placed on either side of the fence, but we need to, but either side needs to take responsibility for that. Our consumers are displaced from agriculture by at least two generations now, they don't know where their food comes from and when they genuinely ask questions, or question methods of of animal agriculture or our production methods I guess, the first thing that farmers and ranchers tend to do is get defensive and that really turns the conversation off from that point, and I think that's an issue that we have from the farmer and rancher side when we're carrying on these conversations is that, we should be more focused on education rather than defending what we do.

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R: I think they feel like a lot of people are in your face. At the end of the day, we're looking at consumers that are asking these questions and they're, they really genuinely want to know, they're genuinely looking for information, while we become defensive, it's a bad perspective from their side of things. They want someone who, they're looking for someone who's going to be an ally for them and often at times we don't pose ourselves as allies for consumers, we pose ourselves as allies for our industry, and the perception there is uh like I said that we have that “in your face attitude” and that defensive attitude that really turns them off ...

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R: I don't feel that the vast majority of consumers understand agriculture, they don't understand where their food comes from, and it's probably you know no fault to them, it's actually the result of us, as far as agriculture and the technology advances that we have, because we just don't need as many farmers as we used to ... when I visit places like New York City and some of these large places I'm just, I walk down the streets and I going "they have no idea where their food is coming from", and like I said I don't blame them, I mean how, why would they, or how would they? 'Cause the information is not out there you know for them to know ...

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R: ... I think we tend to talk in ah language that the general public does not relate too. I think we tend to use acronyms, we tend to talk down to the general public, treat them as if they were stupid rather than ignorant ... stupid is forever, ignorance can be fixed, but ignorance is a lack of education and knowledge and stupid to me means you are either incapable or understanding or you've made up your mind about something and closed it off to the point of being incapable of understanding it ...

Another technique used to position the public as ignorant and reduce their credibility was the sharing of anecdotes about the public that reflected as such. This is an example of using “negative-ethos,” ethos being the Aristotelian rhetoric of argument by reason of appealing to the good character of the speaker. Negative-ethos in turn serves to undermine the character of the agent, in this context (Cook, 2010), the public, and those in opposition to animal agriculture. When sharing stories about the general public, only stories of when the person in question was misinformed and wrong were used. Examples of when members of the public had displayed some level of knowledge about animal agriculture were not shared. Furthermore, the example's shared, such as those below, can reasonably be assumed to be extreme examples and not representative of the broader public population.

R: ... I have had some pretty funny questions over my time ... I think I saw a comment one time about having to slaughter chickens for eggs, which isn't exactly how that works.

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R: On an airplane I had a conversation with a lady, we were talking about the lamb industry and she said “the lambs are just so cute,” and I said “yeah that was one of the hardest things I did in grad school was when we had to kill lambs, they are cute, but we had to kill them,” and she said “I can't believe you would do something like that,” and I said “well do you eat lamb?” and she said “yes, but I get my lamb from the Kroger.” She did not know that lamb came from an animal.

Similarly, the same technique was used when discussing animal activists – only negative anecdotes were shared. In the following quote, the respondent who stated that the vegan had “closed off” her mind, is the same respondent who previously distinguished the difference

between “ignorant” and “stupid” as ignorant being able to be fixed, and stupid being “forever” because “you’ve made up your mind about something and closed it off to the point of being incapable of understanding it” (p.17). Therefore, the respondent was implying that the vegan was stupid.

R: ... I had an experience at a dinner party with a young woman who was a vegan ... and she stuck her finger in my face and called me a murderer, um it was in a restaurant there were a lot of people turning around looking and I just said I’m sorry you feel that way, and changed the subject. Because her mind was made up based on whatever her perception was of the situation, there was nothing that I had to say that she was going to hear because she had closed off her mind.

Another concept which arose was that worrying about aspects of animal agriculture, such as the conditions in which animals are raised and how they are treated, is a “first-world” problem. As discussed in the Chapter 2, economic prosperity in Western countries has led to animal welfare becoming a post-materialistic value. The idea that consumers in America have many more choices and don’t have to concern themselves with having enough to eat, unlike in other countries, again works to undermine and invalidate the concerns of the public, as if they are concerned with things that don’t really matter, when they ought to be content with the fact that they have access to food.

R: Uh you know I think especially at least in north America and the United States in particular and many other developed countries around the world, we are so fortunate, we have so many choices in the food system that applies to animal agriculture as well, that we have a lot more time to concern ourselves with things than when when we were just concerned with having enough food to eat or having enough money to buy the food we needed, we didn’t concern ourselves with so many issues now I don't know if you can say that’s good or bad but you cant debate that right now, but we have do have an environment where people have a lot more time to worry about various animal agriculture issues ...

### **Explanations of opposition to animal agriculture**

The opposition to animal agriculture from the general public was largely attributed to a combination of a lack of education, experience, and nostalgic views of the agricultural industry.

The ignorance and lack of education used to construct the general public in the previous section of this analysis was also attributed to any lay person's opposition to animal agriculture. The following example refers to the public's "idealistic", "romanticized", and "idyllic" ideas regarding animal agriculture.

R: ... you've also got the broader group of the public, who just believes that um the majority of today's contemporary production practices are fundamentally inconsistent with their values, that they have a certain idealistic notion of how animals should be treated and when they see images of today's production practices or they hear stories of today's production practices those are wildly inconsistent with the romanticized notion of, of how they believe animals should be treated, and so if they have this idyllic notion of kind of grandpa's farm with two cattle and three pigs and handful of chickens and they see this much more industrialized type of system, um that, that strikes them as being fundamentally inconsistent with their values and it creates cognitive dissonance ...

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R: I think the polyannic kind of view, that animals still live in red barns, you know, and graze pasture, and have happy smiley faces and the reality of, basically the way that animals are raised in modern production systems, is just, you know there's this bucolic view of the 1950s agriculture versus the realities of today, and you know I think animal agriculture sometimes kinds of reinforces that bucolic view ...

The above example constructs the public as living in the past and out of sync with "the realities of today." This, in addition to the example below, serves to further characterize the public as unaware and uninformed regarding animal agriculture.

R: Well, um, so I think part of it is people are still very nostalgic when it comes to agriculture ... we also have that old McDonald thought in our head. And so we just think that those animals need to be outside, we just need to have a view of them, we just need to put them on the pasture, we need to you know, I mean, that's where animals belong. ... they're not thinking about the days when its 30 below 0 and we have a blizzard and we have 3 feet of snow and those animals what are they to do? That, those thoughts never enter their mind, um they're not thinking about you know predators, um when they're outside, they're not thinking about all of the additional disease risks like for pigs you have mange, and, and when you're inside you don't have to deal with mange you don't have to deal with parasites, and when you're outside you do. They just don't understand why we would need to bring them, those animals inside, because again it's just that huge disconnect between their life you know and their vision of farming and what is reality.

In addition to nostalgic views, other participants referred to the relationship people have with domestic pets as having influenced their confusion about animal agriculture, highlighting the lack of experience lay people have with livestock.

R: I do think a lot of people's only experience with animals in 2015 is their dog or cat, or their uncle's cat or dog, and they don't really differentiate between the way that we treat a Labrador retriever with the way that you might treat a pig, and so maybe they think that you know that the animals should all be treated like pets without kind of an understanding that our pets live a very privileged life and that it would really change the economics of animal products to allow pigs you know to have access to the sofa and live in the type of environment that our pets do.

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R: I don't know when it happened, or how it happened, but at some point in history we ... started deeming animals as not just living beings, but um they started almost giving you know posing the idea that these animals have the same rights and the same privileges as people ... Um, the, you know, everyone had their dog or their cat, and more and more as time progressed, those dogs and cats started becoming not just the family pet, but part of the family, and if a dog and cat can be deemed a part of the family, what's stopping people from deeming a horse as a part of the family? And we're at that point now, the horse is considered a pet and it's now a part of the family, and that's now rolling over and flowing into the livestock world of pigs and people have, you know they have pet pigs now, even cattle, where is the line drawn? Where, 30 years ago an animal was an animal, um we are people, they are animals, but we are putting animals up on the same level as people now ...

The influence of animal activists on the public's perception of animal agriculture also was noted as a major influence to varying levels of opposition. The public was constructed as vulnerable and easily manipulated, which was perceived to be negative when animal activists were reaching out to them. However, their vulnerability and ability to be manipulated was not explicitly referred to as negative when it was the animal agriculture industry who needed to engage and educate the public on their position, and now rely on engaging with the public using a shared values approach.

R: I think ... two reasons. One there's a number of these activist's groups out there that uh or vegans, they have a philosophy that is anti-animal agriculture, period. And they have been very effective communicators, and much of some of the public have um become

quite confused and by this, they maybe still eat meat but they are not sure they should, that sort of thing and so there becomes, they become anti- and that's part of the problem, so. ...

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R: I think people do see their dogs and cats as animals but yet a part of their family and so it's hard for them to not see other animals in that same way, and then on the, at the same time while, while they're seeing animals in that light then they have those paid activists telling them bad stories, made up stories, so I think it's really easy to communicate it in that way and those paid activists make more and more money every time. So I, I think that that's probably the bottom line, is they're just getting, getting the wrong message and they're already feeling very comfortable with their own animals.

The influence of animal activists tied back into the construction of them as financially motivated and dishonest; the more influence the activists were perceived to have, the greater their profits would be.

R: I think another one is that we have people who are trying to push a vegan agenda and they're trying to, to bring it out in a manner that makes it look like they have more of an issue with what's going on in agriculture rather than having the, they're trying to disguise their overarching mission of, of their vegan agenda or the abolishment of animal agriculture, with topics such as antibiotics or, such as animal welfare, environmental stewardship, all the different things that we work on a day to day basis.

Animal activists also were constructed as attempting to deny humans the right of free choice by attempting to control what options are available to the general public at both the retail and food service level.

R: ... interestingly some people think that their opinion should count for everybody and they should be able to override other people's choices with their choices and they know what's best and therefore we should ban this or ban that. But that's not really how it typically works in a free society, but there's certainly efforts at foot to try and prohibit this, that, and the other, which does limit the choice of people who have a different opinion. For example, in Proposition 2, they really removed the choice of low income people to access eggs at the same price that they did a year ago, but that choice is no longer available to them ...

There was seldom mention of possible philosophical, moral, or ethical motivations of animal activists and the public for opposing animal agriculture. These concepts were only mentioned in passing statements, which not only shows how unimportant the respondents

consider them to be, but they were sometimes followed by “whatever” or “etc”, which further undermines their legitimacy as a reason for opposition, as noted earlier in the analysis.

R: I mean, obviously there's people that just have philosophical concerns with eating animals, and that's kind of the vegan group, and their thing is more of an ethical, you know, statement or whatever about “I don't want to have anything, use any animal products” ...

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R: Oh, there's probably a lot of different reasons. It can be anything from religious to, um social, to um, reasons to um, you know whatever, just um personal experience. ... Well there's just some people who don't believe in raising animals for food and again that could be for religious purposes, it can be um because they had a negative experience with the food product, meat or milk or whatever, or it could be um, just a sort of a fundamental political or personal um belief in, in uh whether or not its ok to raise animals to produce food for human beings.

Only one participant acknowledged that consumers may be wrestling a genuine ethical and moral dilemma when considering their support for the animal agriculture industry. The fact that it was only acknowledged by one person demonstrates how little validation the idea is given.

R: So yeah, I think the opposition is there because again at the end of the day we are taking another life, a life of another mammal or, or bird, whatever, um ... but then we have the majority of the population that their uneasiness is they feel that we're not treating those animals humanely throughout their life and if we kill them for food, so we have to do a better job of explaining that. And then there's also an issue because we in animal agriculture, we're horrible at talking about it, we don't want to admit at times that yes we are killing an animal for food, so we have to find a way to have much more open and meaningful conversations that would hope would reduce opposition ...

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R: I think a general challenge is at the end of the day we are still killing an animal. And while you know if we were a society that was still based in hunter and gathering stage, or even agrarian society, that process wouldn't be so foreign to us, but the fact that many consumers have probably never you know, processed a chicken on their own or watched an animal be slaughtered ... I think that's the biggest challenge we have, at the end of the day we are still killing another life and people don't comprehend that all the time and it makes them uneasy.

In summary, opposition to animal agriculture from the general public was determined to be caused by ignorance, confusion, and the manipulative tactics of animal activists. When the idea that someone who was opposed to animal agriculture may indeed be capable of making an autonomous and considered opinion without being influenced by animal activists was raised to one participant, they exhibited cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and were unable to comprehend the possibility of such a person existing, shown below.

I: OK, um what about people who may be opposed to some facets of animal agriculture, but not animal agriculture overall. Why do you think, or so the people that are also highly educated and maybe aren't being persuaded by the activists, but, um, have gone and done some research themselves, why do you think, um, what do you think about those people?

R: I, well I'm not sure who those people are, uh, I mean are you talking about people who say that want, that want cage free eggs, kind of people?

I: I suppose, so just coming back to your previous answer for why there was some opposition to animal agriculture, and I suppose the answer I got from you was there was – the activists are quite influential, but I was just wondering about people who maybe oppose animal agriculture but weren't influenced by animal activists, they may have had other reasons?

R: Well I'm not, I, I really don't understand who you would be talking about.

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R: So I think those people just need to understand why we do certain things. I've hosted people on my ranch and explained exactly why it is very important for me to be able to put an antibiotic in the mineral that my cows receive every day during the summer. They do need to have a little of an antibiotic every single day and when that is explained, that is it a disease prevention and a suffering prevention, then usually the people are very comfortable with it. Um you know I've seen that first hand, they are explained and able to ask those questions of me, they go away feeling a lot better about why we do uh certain practices.

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R: I find that, you know, 9 times out of 10 when somebody has a question about "why is this happening?", if you just explain to them what you're doing and why you're doing it they're ok with it, it's just all the misinformation that's out there or just that lack of information that, that attention, or the negativity comes toward it agriculture.



An active push has been initiated to encourage those within the agricultural industry to engage with the public, not only using a discourse of science, but through demonstrating shared values and creating a narrative. It appears that while parts of the industry have come to acknowledge that they cannot “science” people into agreeing with them, and that science alone is not compelling enough, they may have replaced their use of a scientific discourse with a discourse focused on shared values. Where once upon a time an individual or organization would rely upon the data to convince people, now some believe that if they can demonstrate shared values with their audience, the audience will indeed come around and agree with their position, as shown in the examples below.

R: Now you can't go in and defend what we do, you can't put your defensive mode on, it doesn't work, you have to put your conversation mode on, you have to talk to them, and typically if you bring down your defense, defensive mode and just start carrying on a conversation and ask why they feel the way they feel and start explaining to them where their information came from versus what we actually do and your personal experiences, you have a much better chance of allowing them to think and make decisions on their own.

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R: So humanizing the subject, storytelling narratives, the types of, what's an effective communication style needs to be mimicked by the scientists when they're talking to the public...

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R: ... so demonstrating that those in animal agriculture in many cases have the same values and ethics that consumers who have desire to eat animal based proteins do have and if we can connect on those values, those emotions, those ethics, then they're going to uh respect the processes that we have in place to ensure that animals are treated humanely and processed or slaughtered humanely.

### **Summary of analysis**

Both credibility and authority, as defined and granted by the participants, were tied to the concepts of motivation and truth. When the motivation of an individual or organization was in support of the animal agriculture industry, they were granted credibility and authority.

Credibility and authority were also granted to those who not only sought to share the truth about animal agriculture, had the hands-on experience to determine what constituted the truth. In turn, anyone who's motivations did not align with the industry, and did not possess practical experience in the industry, were regarded as lacking credibility and authority on the topic of animal agriculture. While the animal agriculture industry claimed to be the only authoritative and credible source on the topic of animal agriculture, it also constructed itself as a marginalized underdog, struggling to compete against animal activists. The industry also constructed the general public as ignorant and misled, attributing those factors to being the reasons for any opposition toward animal agriculture.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusions by research question

The following is a brief conclusion of the results as they relate to the research questions presented in Chapter One. Though research questions 1 and 4 were different, the answers to them will be discussed together because the answers demonstrated an interrelationship. Research question 1 sought to prompt how participants used discourse to enact and depict the identities of themselves and other groups in the study. Research question 4 sought to prompt how language and discourse were used to justify the participant's authority, which was found to be highly related to identity.

***RQ 1: How are the three groups using discourse to enact and depict the identities of each themselves, the other groups in the study, and the other participants in the conversation?***

***RQ4: How does each group use language to argue and justify their authority as it relates to the practice of agricultural communication?***

The three groups in the study (academic experts, professional communicators, and agricultural advocates) used language to construct themselves as authoritative, credible and guided by the “truth” and the “right” motivations. It was unknown before the study if each of the three groups would use language to differentiate themselves from the other groups of participants – this was not the case. Instead, each group acknowledged the other two groups as being similar to them, but clearly differentiated themselves from people with opposition to animal agriculture as well as the general public. This created an in-group/out-group effect, whereby anybody who supported the animal agriculture industry was in the in-group, and thereby granted varying levels of authority and credibility.

Language was used both explicitly and implicitly. Some participants made references to people in opposition as unknowledgeable, spreading misinformation, and as being liars. Other participants instead referred to their own level of personal experience in the industry and their desire to communicate the “truth” – “*we just have to be able to offer the truth*” – implicitly stating that people in opposition did not share the same qualities and motivations, and thus should not be granted authority or credibility.

Participants claimed the authoritative ground on the topic of animal agriculture by emphasizing the importance of having hands-on experience in animal production, implicitly stating that those without such experience lacked credibility. The motivation behind communication proved to be more meaningful than hands-on experience. Those with little to no hands-on experience could, at times, be granted credibility and authority when their motivations aligned with the industry.

***RQ2: What power dynamics exist within the animal agriculture conversation, how is power constituted, and how is discourse functioning to enable this?***

While participants claimed the authoritative ground on the topic of animal agriculture, they also positioned themselves, and the industry overall, as being disempowered, marginalized and the underdog. Most participants made reference to how less than 2% of the United States population was involved in agriculture, that perhaps 2% of the population was opposed to animal agriculture specifically, and that they needed to reach and educate the remaining 96% of the U.S. population – creating a sizeable and overwhelming task for any individual, organization, or industry. At the same time, the extensive human and financial resources of activist organizations were highlighted, furthering the construction of the animal agriculture industry as an underdog. The dedicated human resources of the agricultural industry to the effort of agricultural

communication and advocacy, as well as financial resources from both the public and private sectors, were not discussed. Instead, agricultural advocates, who often work as volunteers in addition to regular employment, were acknowledged as the industry's primary opportunity to rebut activists, constructing the idea that the industry was reliant on volunteers working overtime to fight its fight. Power as knowledge was constituted through hands-on experience and empirical objectivity – the animal agriculture industry claimed power as knowledge, as only their experience and objectivity was deemed valid. Power as influence was constituted through the perception of money and human resources – in this case it was awarded to organizations opposed to animal agriculture, even though the animal agriculture industry has its own significant funding and human resources support.

***RQ3: How does each group use language to explain opposition to animal agriculture from other participants in the conversation, and how does this work to reify power dynamics?***

A binary explanation was offered for those in opposition to animal agriculture; people were either extremists or they were uneducated and being manipulated by extremists. Seldom was time spent discussing or exploring the spectrum of reasons as to why an individual may be opposed to animal agriculture. The philosophical, moral, and ethical factors that many individuals and organizations identify with were briefly acknowledged by less than half of the participants; financial motives for ending animal agriculture were instead highlighted. Members of the general public who displayed any level of opposition to animal agriculture were constructed as well-meaning, but unformed, misled, and ignorant. This worked to undermine and delegitimize the opinions and contributions of people in opposition, and have power remain with those within the industry.

## Discussion

This research project was initiated from the researcher's frustration with the way constituents within the animal agricultural industry often communicate about themselves and their practices, as well as with their opponents and the public. During the data analysis, the researcher came across a blog being promoted on Facebook, titled "*When a farm kid goes to an animal rights conference...*" (Bardot, 2016).

I attained a dislike for these groups that felt the need to bully and pressure their way into getting what they think is best for animals – which often does not align with science ... (para. 3) I learned that most of the animal activists will believe the lies of "factory farming" without ever hearing the truth from farmers themselves ... (para. 9) the activists are willing to say anything to make people believe their lies about farming ... (para. 10) While claiming to care about farm animals, activist groups rely on lies and misinformation to spread their goal of ending animal agriculture while I rely on truths, farmers' experiences and science to promote the industry I love (para. 11).

The blog was a prime example of how the animal agriculture industry uses of a discourse of science to discredit anyone whose motivation does not align with that of the animal agriculture industry, while claiming to be the only party with valid experience who is speaking the "truth."

Even with recent efforts by the animal agriculture industry to move to a shared-values approach to communication, the participants in the study still largely communicated from a discourse of science. The results of this study supported those of Cook, Pieri, and Robbins (2004) who found that GM scientists used "rhetorical devices ... to ultimately undermine participation by non-experts in areas including rationality, knowledge, understanding, and objectivity" (p. 433).

The participants referred to people who had some level of opposition to animal agriculture (i.e. approve of the use of animals only under specific conditions) as being confused, uneducated, and manipulated by animal activists. When prompted as to why people may disagree

with some facets of animal agriculture, common responses were people having outdated and idyllic notions of animal production. Hypothetical members of the public who had reservations or grievances with facets of animal agriculture had those concerns undermined by being characterized as irrational due to their relationship with their pets and domestic animals; people were seen as being unable to differentiate how different animals ought to be treated. This characterization of the public as irrational is similar to the observations of Vanhonacker et al. (2007) who found that people involved with animal agriculture had a tendency to position themselves as knowledgeable and rational, while dismissing the concerns of the public as emotional and uninformed. In a society where many people treat their pets as well as they do any member of their human family, this researcher believes that it is not unreasonable for them to ask such questions about the treatment of livestock. While the difference between the purpose and associated treatment of livestock and domestic pets may be clear cut for those within animal agriculture, it appears from the researcher's observations that that is not the case for the some in the community. This begs the question: who is to decide which animals are to be pampered with treats, toys, and given individual names, and which are to live their lives nameless, confined, and destined for slaughter?

Negative ethos was used in anecdotes about out-group members (those in opposition, and the public) to undermine their character and credibility (i.e. the story about the vegan calling the participant a murderer, pg. 72). In each anecdote shared, the name of the person being discussed was not shared, as was no further context as to who they were. While it is understandable that the participants may have wished to protect the identity of those they were discussing, choosing to not even give them even a false name (e.g., "I was talking to this man, let's call him 'Bob' ...") served to remove their individuality, and help construct them as a representative of the

population they belonged to (either opponent or general public). This can be likened to Stibbe's (2001) finding that the use of mass nouns instead of count nouns removed the individuality of animals, constructing them as replaceable representatives of a group. Lawrence (1994) said that "If there are no differences among members of a group, their value and importance are greatly diminished so that it is easier to dislike them and justify their exploitation and destruction" (p.181). While this was said in reference to both racisms among humans and animals, it does speak to the practice of not naming individuals in anecdotes. The people referred to in the anecdotes were constructed as representatives of their population group rather than an individual person with individual experiences and beliefs who may not necessarily represent a larger group. When a story is told about a person with no context, it is much easier to generalize the story and apply it to other people. For example, consider the following statements: 1) "I met this woman on the plane who told me that lamb came from the grocery store"; 2) "I met this woman, Adele, she was from New York, she'd lived there her whole life and she thought lamb came from the grocery store." When context is available, it is harder for the attributes of the person in question to be applied to a larger population. However, the researcher would like to acknowledge that while the language choices of the participants functioned in this particular way, that very well may not have been their intention – the participants may not even have been aware of how their linguistic choices were functioning.

Similar to Cook et. al. (2004), the researcher found that the respondents also subscribed to a "knowledge deficit model" (Gregory and Miller, 1998), where they thought that opposition to an idea could be remedied by education. This concept was prominent when participants were asked why some people are opposed to animal agriculture. This also ties in with the idea of bounded rationality, whereby any decision made by an individual is bounded by the information



they have, the cognitive limitations of their minds, and the amount of time they have to make that decision (Simon, 1955). In this instance, the public and those who had some level of opposition to animal agriculture were characterized as misled, and animal activists were seen as lying to the public; therefore it was assumed that the public was bounded by misinformation when making decisions about animal agriculture. While there may be individuals forming opinions and making decisions under bounded rationality, it is problematic to assume that that is the case for anyone who disagrees and/or has some level of opposition to animal agriculture.

Another assumption that presented itself numerous times in the data was that animal activists try to conceal their motive of ending animal agriculture. Some participants stated that, animal activists should be awarded no credibility in conversations regarding animal agriculture because they are concealing their primary goal (of ending animal agriculture), and therefore misleading the public. One would expect that even when a speaker's underlying motives may not align with the audience they are communicating to, as long as they are honest and upfront about their motivations, they still have the right to communicate and the ability to contribute to the discussion. It is whether animal activists are honest and/or upfront about their motives however which is a point of speculation for many within the animal agriculture industry. Again this works with the assumption that the public is being misled and is unaware of the true intentions of people fundamentally opposed to animal agriculture.

While the financial motivations of those in opposition to animal agriculture were a primary topic in the discussion, the academic experts claimed to have no financial interests in the industry. However, while their positions may not be as directly reliant on the success of the industry as someone working in the private sector may be, their jobs do rely on the continuation of animal agriculture; so it is arguable that they indeed have a vested interest. Furthermore, the

fact that the other seven participants did not mention the profit motivations of the animal agriculture industry could be interpreted a number of different ways. It could be that the participants had not even considered their industry to have a profit motivation because they are doing the “right thing” or “in the right”, or it could be that they are aware of the industry’s profit motivation but do not consider it to be an issue as the industry is doing nothing wrong by raising animals for food and fiber. In this instance, profit motivation only becomes a negative when those earning a profit do not align with the industry.

“Animal activists” in general were referred to frequently in responses to a number of interview questions, not just questions that inquired about opposition to animal agriculture. Furthermore, no initial questions explicitly referred to animal activists (but follow-up questions sometimes did). The frequency, however, with which respondents shifted the discussion to animal activists and how often they were able to tie them into different aspects of the interview, suggests that animal activists are a topic that often occupies their thoughts; animal activists and the threat they pose is a topic that is always in the back of their mind when thinking about the animal agriculture industry. This may contribute to the tendency of those within the industry to focus on the most extreme tactics of animal activists when discussing them, such as those who break into facilities or collect unauthorized footage.

### **Conclusion of the discussion**

The animal agriculture industry is experiencing a shift in the way society values animals and its expectations of how animals should be used and treated. Segments of society are questioning the choices made by the industry, which the industry is defending with the rigidity of science and what they acknowledge as “truth.” The animal agriculture industry needs to be aware

of the discourse from within which it operates if they wish to be able to engage with other members of society and gain longevity for their industry.

The crux of this situation comes down to the notion of “truth” and the ideologies competing for the status of which particular “truth” is “right.” Within the animal agriculture industry, the use of animals for food, fiber, sport, and entertainment is not questioned; it is accepted as natural, inevitable, and legitimate. It is beyond that, to the conditions that animals are raised in, where the difference between what is “right” and “wrong” becomes a point of discussion. On the other hand, there are other segments of society that believe animals should not be used for food, fiber, sport and entertainment, regardless of the animal welfare administered throughout the animals’ lifetimes. This particular ideology is not wrong, and it is not right; it is simply different. However, the majority of the participants used language to delegitimize and dismiss the value of that particular ideology. Foucault (1980) conceptualized the idea that each society operates within a ‘regime of truth’, defined as:

The types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (pp. 109-33).

The dominant discourse within American society is one that works to construct the use of animals as natural, inevitable, and legitimate. This “truth” is reinforced by the theological discourse of human dominion over animals [Genesis (1:28)], as well as the scientific discourse of empirical objectivity, quantitative data, and facts. This discourse is reproduced through education, the media, and politics, and is linked to the concept of power. Discourse is related to power in that “they make available certain versions of reality and personhood, while marginalizing alternative knowledges and associated practices” (Georgaca & Avdi, 2012, p. 148). The discourse used by the animal agriculture industry not only serves to normalize the use

of animals, but enforce those within the industry as the only authoritative and credible sources on the topic.

Another way in which the animal agriculture industry attempts to maintain its power over other participants in the conversation is by never questioning its own fundamental belief of the use of animals, as it is the accepted “truth.” Instead, industry members sought to educate others not on *why* what they are doing is right, but *how* it is right. Some participants spoke about how they would not engage with people with fundamentally different beliefs, choosing instead to communicate with those in “the middle”, because they would never be successful in changing the mind of the others. The idea that people should even consider trying to change such a person’s mind on the topic of animal agriculture shows a disregard for the ideologies of those individuals. Generally speaking, when people have a fundamental opposition to the use of animals in any aspect, it speaks to a fundamental difference in the philosophical and ontological position they have, not a lack of awareness and education. To think that one could change another’s mind completely devalues the beliefs of the other. While the animal agriculture industry is using science and facts to communicate what *can* be done, the wider community is asking if it *should* be done. Just because an animal can live a physically healthy life and produce meat efficiently while in a cage, should that be the case?

Language helps us construct not only our own identities, but those of other humans and non-humans (Butler, 1990). The way we use language influences how we make meaning, and how we communicate that meaning. The discourse from within that the participants in this study operate served to reinforce the idea of the existence of an objective truth, by which those within the industry are the authoritative and credible sources. It further serves to marginalize and undermine those in the out-group. However, this researcher does not believe in an objective

truth, rather than knowledge is continually mediated through social processes and existing structures. The lack of reflexivity from those within the industry, when others challenge their objective truth, is functioning to limit the ability for the animal agriculture industry to progress and ensure its sustainability. It is as if the industry sees any flexibility on its behalf toward the ideas of those in the out-group as the first step toward a vegan utopia, when in fact a shift in the paradigm of the industry may result in finding a new point of balance that will ensure the sustainability of the industry.

### **Implications and recommendations for practice**

This study highlights the reliance of the participants on empirical objectivity as the only means to judge what is true, valid, and rational. Very little, if any, validity was granted to arguments based on emotion, philosophy, and from different ethical perspectives. However, this rationale regarding emotion and philosophy was only applied to members of the out-group. The participants themselves did indeed demonstrate the use of emotion when expressing judgements and opinions throughout the interviews. The participants highlighted their objectivity on the topic of animal agriculture through a discourse of science, while failing to acknowledge the strong emotional investment they had in the industry, which it is reasonable to assume given the tenor of their comments and positions.

Furthermore, it appears that the participants had a limited self-awareness about their epistemological position (i.e. how they determine what constitutes knowledge, particularly in terms of validity and methods, and what distinguishes justified belief from opinion) and how it functioned to shape their world view and discourse. It is recommended that the participants, and others communicating on behalf of the animal agriculture industry, be more reflexive when determining what constitutes knowledge beyond empirical objectivity.

The researcher recommends that those communicating on behalf of the animal agriculture industry become more aware of how their beliefs, values, and ideologies impact their communication. The researcher also calls for a greater tolerance of those who do not share the views of those within the industry, from those with marginal levels of opposition to those fundamentally opposed to animal agriculture. The researcher would like to clarify that she is calling for a tolerance of other ideologies, and not a tolerance of the various tactics and strategies used by particular individuals and organizations as they try to realize their ideologies. For example, a person who believes in eating meat but does not agree with intensive livestock production, rather advocating for free-range produce, should not be dismissed as ignorant, and having romanticised notions of animal production. Their belief is not right, nor wrong, it is different – because there is no “right.” In addition, those who communicate should become more reflexive about the motivations of different stakeholders, including the industry itself.

The use of negative ethos when sharing anecdotes about the general public serves to reproduce the idea that the public is indeed uneducated and ignorant on the topic of animal welfare. This is how the language is functioning, even if this is unintentional on the behalf of the communicator. If these are the only types of anecdotes to be shared, they will serve to reproduce this idea. The researcher suggests that the industry acknowledge that there is a portion of the community who possesses knowledge about animal agriculture and this level of knowledge and experience is highly variable. It is also recommended that those communicating on behalf of the industry, challenge the use of false binaries such as “us vs. them,” and “right and wrong,” to avoid over simplifying issues. Instead communicators should acknowledge the highly nuanced nature of issues and perspectives relating to the industry.

Finally, it is recommended that the participants be more reflexive to the motivations and assumptions of different stakeholders in the animal agriculture industry, including the industry itself. Most participants failed to acknowledge the moral and ethical motivations of those in opposition to animal agriculture, instead focusing on the perceived financial motivations, while simultaneously failing to acknowledge the financial motivations of the animal agriculture industry, instead focusing on their moral and ethical motivations.

### **Implications and recommendations for research**

As demonstrated in the literature review, little discourse analysis work has been produced with a focus on the animal agriculture industry. This research also focused on a very specific set of participants within the animal agriculture industry. The researcher believes that this work should be extended to other groups participating in the animal agriculture conversation. It would be beneficial to extend this work to study the discourse used by people in opposition to animal agriculture, as well as the general public.

This research reflects the spoken discourse used by the participants. Future research should investigate how discourse is enacted in written communication, such as industry publications, magazines, and policy documents – is discourse functioning in similar ways in both verbal and written text? Furthermore, this research reflects the discourse used under the conditions of a one-on-one interview between the participant and a researcher, who was identified to the participants as belonging agricultural community (and thus in their in-group). Future research also should seek to understand how discourse functions in interactions between stakeholders in the animal agricultural industry. For example, one area of study may look to understand how discourses are presented at an interactive forum, such as conferences, discussion panels, and round-table meetings. When competing discourses are presented between

stakeholders, how are they negotiated to achieve a consensus? In continuing to look at the function of discourse in agricultural communication through a critical discourse analysis perspective, future research should also seek to understand how different discourses are positioned and what power relationships are inherent in them. Another area of interest would be to study the effect of research methodology on the in-group/out-group effect present in this data – would the effect which was present in one-on-one interviews, become stronger through a focus group scenario when several members of the in-group are present, or would the addition of other participants in the conversation lead to a more robust discussion?

Finally, this research was undertaken from a critical inquiry perspective; this study has shed light on some of the power structures inherent between the animal agriculture industry and the general public. It is recommended that others undertaking research in the field of agricultural sociology consider doing so from a critical theory perspective, to continually challenge the assumptions and conditions under which the industry operates.

### **Final thoughts**

The relationship between humans and animals is not only dynamic and highly personal, but also ever-evolving. There are a number of competing and conflicting discourses at play regarding the use of animals in agriculture. Some discourses work from the position of there being a single reality, whereby the use of animals is natural and right. Other discourses work to question and challenge the reality in which we live. As the human experience is so varied, not just between different countries and cultures, but also within, it is unlikely that there will ever be a single shared approach to this topic.

Those within the animal agriculture industry currently operate within a discourse that offers little reflexivity and delegitimizes competing discourses. Those involved in the industry



possess a special knowledge and level of expertise when it comes to the topic of animal agriculture and have a wealthy contribution to make to the discussion. However, it remains that those in non-specialist capacities, i.e., the general public and those in opposition, also have the potential to make valuable contributions to future discussions.

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## Appendix One. Interview Question Guide

Hello, \_\_\_\_\_.

*Thank you for making time for me today. I have a number of questions I would like to ask you about your thoughts on animal agriculture communication, and opposition to animal agriculture. Before we begin, do you have any questions?*

<If yes, answer questions. If no, begin interview.>

*Thanks. To begin our interview, I'd like to start with a few questions about you.*

1. Can you tell me a bit about
  - yourself
  - your background in animal agriculture
  - your current position
2. “Advocate” “expert” and “professional communicator” are some of the words used to describe people of the industry, do you see yourself primarily as any of these titles?
  - Do you see yourself primarily as a: academic or expert / professional communicator / advocate?
  - How do you define that role?
  - How do you think society views that role?
  - What sort of training did you go through?
  - How and what would you like the public to think about you, and your role?
  - What other words would you use to describe yourself, or do you identify with?
  - What does that mean to you?
  - How is that defined by the profession or by your peers?
  - Why did you decide to become a xyz?
3. What does it mean to be an “expert” when communicating about animal agriculture to the public?
4. Who do you think has the authority to speak on the topic of animal agriculture?
  - (Elaborate, guide to clarify)
  - What does authority mean?
  - Criteria
  - Has the authority changed over time?
  - More authority?
  - Do you think people in opposition to animal agriculture have any authority to speak on the topic?

- Can you speak to *your* authority to communicate about animal agriculture?
- 5. Whose responsibility is it to communicate about animal agriculture to public?
  - Does anyone have more responsibility than someone else?
- 6. Who do you think is best positioned to communicate to the public about animal agriculture, and why?
- 7. How do you think information about animal agriculture should be disseminated to the public?
  - (Medium/ format)
  - (Level of information/ transparency)
  - One way or two way?
  - What needs to be done different/ better?
- 8. Can you tell me your opinions and thoughts on the general public when it comes to the topic of animal agriculture?
  - Biggest challenge
- 9. How would you describe your relationship with the public?
  - How would you describe the relationship of (their group) with the public in general?
- 10. What are your thoughts toward academic or experts / professional communicators /advocates?
  - How would you describe your relationship with academic or experts / professional communicators /advocates?
- 11. Why do you think there is opposition to animal agriculture?
  - What about from people who are highly educated or have been involved in the industry?
- 12. What do you think is the best response to opposition to animal agriculture?
  - In general / from consumers
  - On an individual basis
  - From activists

*Well, we are at the end of our questions. Can you think of any questions or suggestions you would like for me to add to your response, or any topics or things I should have asked you about?*

<If yes, make note of response.>

<If no:> Thank you again for your help today. Goodbye.