



Investigating the role of meat commitment in public preferences for animal welfare in Swiss agricultural policy

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Introduction

Animal welfare is one of the central political goals of agricultural policy. Here we examine its perceived importance as such on the one hand, and its importance when it is in direct conflict with other agricultural policy objectives on the other.

Aim 1: Investigate the importance of animal welfare as such and in the context of different target conflicts

Aim 2: Analyse the predictors of the importance of animal welfare with a focus on personal values

Method

1,542 participants (52% female)
Age: $M = 44.6$, $SD = 15$ years

Online survey across the Italian, French, and German speaking parts of Switzerland (33% each)

Results

Animal welfare is perceived as important. This finding remains, even when animal welfare is in direct conflict with other agricultural policy goals (Figure 1).

Meat commitment is a significant, negative predictor for the weighing of animal welfare for all three tested pairs of conflicting agricultural policy goals (Table 1). Individuals who are more committed to meat eating tend to assign less importance to animal welfare than those with lower meat commitment.

Table 1: Linear regression models explaining the weighing of conflicts between animal welfare and conflicting goals ($N = 1,542$)

	Animal welfare vs. domestic production			Animal welfare vs. food prices			Animal welfare vs. farmers' income		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Constant	30.66***	5.79		47.60***	5.77		21.91***	5.60	
Gender	-4.72***	1.30	-0.09	-3.95**	1.29	-0.07	-3.27**	1.25	-0.06
Age	0.08	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.01
Education	0.65	0.39	0.04	-0.46	0.39	-0.03	0.66	0.38	0.04
Place of residence	0.12	0.55	0.01	1.67**	0.54	0.07	0.57	0.53	0.03
Political orientation	0.11***	0.03	0.09	0.09**	0.03	0.08	0.07*	0.03	0.06
Perception of farmers ^a	3.78***	0.69	0.14	1.90**	0.69	0.07	6.85***	0.67	0.25
Ecological welfare ^b	-10.51***	1.13	-0.23	-12.04***	1.12	-0.26	-10.84***	1.09	-0.24
Meat commitment ^c	3.05***	0.40	0.20	3.70***	0.40	0.24	2.42***	0.38	0.16
$F(8, 1533)$	40.10***			46.33***			42.44***		
R^2	.17			.20			.18		

Note. Gender: 0 = man, 1 = woman; place of residence from 1 (very rural) to 5 (very urban), political orientation from 0 (very left) to 100 (very right), ^a agreement from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much), ^b importance from 1 (not important at all) to 4 (very important) (Lindeman & Vaananen, 2000), ^c agreement on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) (Piazza et al., 2015),

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

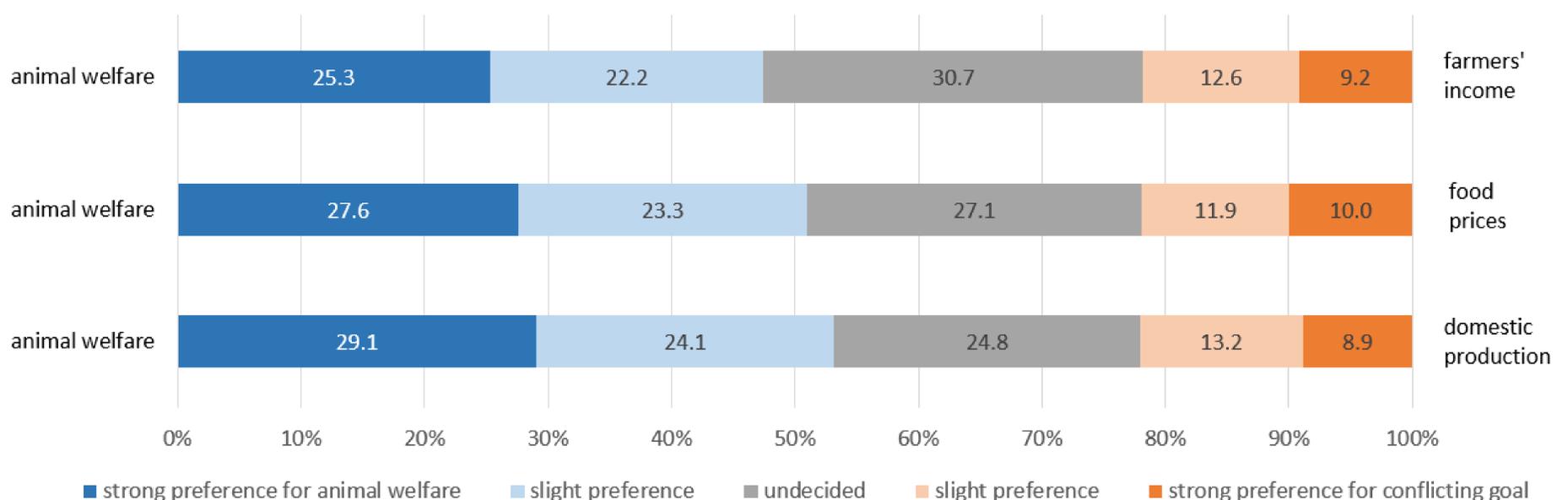


Figure 1: Participants' preferences when weighing animal welfare against conflicting agricultural policy goals ($N = 1,542$)

Key Findings, Implications and Outlook

- Committed meat eaters are less likely to endorse *universalistic values*, that is, animal welfare.
- The fact that all value variables correlate highly with the importance of animal welfare as an agricultural policy goal suggests that this goal appeals directly to *personal values*.
- Meat consumption and commitment are variable and evolving constructs. This must also apply to agricultural policy, as popular support and demand for animal welfare in the population are related to those constructs.
- Understanding meat commitment of a society can therefore help assess its support for animal welfare policies.

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