Ohioans’ Attitudes about Animal Welfare

A Topical Report from the 2004 Ohio Survey of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Issues

Prepared by Andrew Rauch and Jeff S. Sharp

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Study Background

The Ohio Survey of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Issues is a biennial statewide survey of rural and urban Ohioans conducted by the Department of Human and Community Resource Development. The study’s primary objective is to measure Ohioans’ attitudes on a variety of topics related to food, agriculture, and the environment, and to track changes in those attitudes over time. The survey was first conducted in 2002.

The current version of the Ohio Survey was mailed to nearly 3,500 randomly selected Ohioans between June and September 2004. The response rate was over 56%, which is favorable for this type of survey.

The project was jointly funded by Ohio State University’s Department of Human and Community Resource Development; Ohio State University Extension; the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC); and the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.

Respondents to the 2004 survey resided in a variety of places. More than 62% of respondents resided in either a city or suburb, and 18% resided in a small town. Sixteen percent resided in the country, not on a farm, and just over 4% resided in the country, on a farm.

Ohioans Care About Farm Animal Well-Being

In the 2004 Ohio Survey of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Issues, Ohioans expressed a high degree of consensus regarding the importance of animal quality of life and well-being. Ninety-two percent of Ohioans agreed or strongly agreed that it is important that farm animals are well-cared for, and 85% agreed or strongly agreed that even though some farm animals are used for meat, the quality of their lives is important (Table 1).

Eighty-one percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the well-being of farm animals is just as important as the well-being of pets, and 75% agreed or strongly agreed that farm animals should be protected from feeling physical pain (Table 1).

The majority of Ohioans expressed some concern that farm animals might experience emotional pain: 69% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: “It is of no concern to me whether farm animals feel emotional pain.” Respondents also agreed that some connection exists between the treatment of animals and other human beings: 63% agreed or strongly agreed that “if people were nicer to animals, they would also be nicer to other people.”

Disagreement on Acceptable Use of Animals

There was considerably less agreement among respondents concerning acceptable use of animals.
Table 1. Attitudes About Farm Animal Well-Being.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is important to me that animals on farms are well-cared for.</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even though some farm animals are used for meat, the quality of their lives is important.</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The well-being of farm animals is just as important as the well-being of pets.</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm animals should be protected from feeling physical pain.</td>
<td>75%</td>
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Figure 1. Humans should be able to use animals for any purpose.

Fifty-seven percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: “As long as animals do not suffer pain, humans should be able to use them for any purpose.” Twenty-two percent agreed with this statement, and 21% were undecided (Figure 1).

Respondents who currently reside on a farm, grew up on a farm, or have frequent conversations with farmers agreed more strongly with this statement. Females disagreed more strongly with the statement than men.

Forty percent of respondents were undecided as to whether “it is acceptable to use animals to grow organs for humans.” Thirty-three percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 27% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 2).

Figure 2: It is acceptable to use animals to grow organs for humans.

Respondents who currently live or grew up on a farm or have frequent conversations with farmers agreed most strongly with this statement. Residents of southeastern (41%) and Central (39%) Ohio agreed with the statement more frequently than residents of other regions. Younger and female respondents disagreed most strongly.

Mixed Feelings on Regulation

Response was mixed regarding the regulation of animal treatment. Forty-seven percent of Ohioans agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “In general, increased regulation of the treatment of animals in farming is needed.” Eighteen percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, and 35% were undecided (Figure 3).
Figure 3. Increased regulation of the treatment of farm animals is needed.

Respondents who currently reside in cities agreed most strongly with this statement, as did younger and female respondents.

Modest Interest in Farm Animal Topics

Overall, interest in animal-related topics was modest among Ohioans. One third of respondents (33%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “I am interested in learning more about farm animals,” and 15% reported that they often discuss the treatment of farm animals with other people. The majority of respondents (62%) reported that they have never contributed money to or volunteered for an animal protection group.

Attitudes About Pets Mixed

Over 62% of respondents reported having a pet. The majority of respondents (54%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that it is acceptable to discipline a pet by smacking or hitting, 25% agreed or strongly agreed, and 21% were undecided.

There was little consensus among respondents on the subject of euthanizing pets. Thirty-six percent of Ohioans agreed or strongly agreed that “Euthanizing (putting to sleep) a pet is an acceptable solution to behavioral problems.” Thirty-eight percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, and 26% were undecided.

Most Say They’d Pay More

Fifty-nine percent of Ohioans said they would be willing to pay more for meat, poultry, or dairy labeled as coming from humanely treated animals. Among those, 43% said they would be willing to pay 10% more, and more than 12% said they would be willing to pay 25% more. Forty-one percent indicated they would not be willing to pay more for such foods (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Willingness to pay for products coming from humanely treated animals.

Acknowledgments

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For additional information about the study and findings related to this topic, contact Jeff S. Sharp at 614-292-9410 or by e-mail (sharp.123@osu.edu).