Farmers and animal welfare: goals, motivation and values

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• Why do farmers care about animal welfare?

• Gains, losses and decisions
A perspective on motivation

• Goals direct decisions and behaviour

• Motivation is derived from a particular goal

• The degree of motivation elicited from a particular goal depends on the subjective utility associated with that goal
Motivation to work with animal welfare

McInerney (2004): Use and non-use values in animal welfare

Use values are derived from productivity considerations

Non-use values are values derived from the wellbeing of the animals, independent of the present or future use the farmer may make of the animal

What are the most important values/motivational factors?


- To feel happy knowing that my dairy cows are well-kept
- To make sure that disease, pain, and injury among my dairy cows are prevented and that diagnosis and treatment are quickly established if needed
- For the business to make enough profit for me to further improve the way my dairy cows are kept
- To feel that I keep my dairy production in the right way
- To make sure that the production of my dairy cows is at such a level that my business is as profitable as possible
- To make sure that my dairy cows are kept in such a way that I can continue my business
- To make sure my dairy cows feel well even when this requires unprofitable actions
- To feel proud that the way I keep my animals is acknowledged by the industry, market or consumers
- Dairy cows have a right to be treated well
- To make sure that my dairy cows have free access to water and that they have a balanced fodder regimen
Gains and losses in decision making
Prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky 1979; 1992):

The utility individuals associate with risky options depends on the reference point taken. There is an asymmetric evaluation of perceived gains and perceived losses compared to a reference point.


Adaption of measures to prevent mastitis:

This is a risky choice because we cannot know the outcome.
Gains of the adaptation of a particular measure in terms of the possibility to reduce the incidence mastitis in the herd.

Losses associated with not adapting a particular measure, in terms of the risk of increased incidence of mastitis in the herd.
Some findings

From Hansson & Lagerkvist (2013) Risk Analysis

Two groups of measures to prevent mastitis:

• Grouping cows and applying milking order to prevent spread of existing infection.
• Working in a precautionary way to prevent mastitis occurring.
Gain/Loss ratio: 'Grouping cows and applying milking order'

Gain/Loss ratio: ‘Working in a precautionary way to prevent mastitis occurring’

Summary and implications for animal health

• Farmers’ decisions and behaviors can be understood as being motivated from motivational factors of both use and non-use type

• Both loss aversion and reversed loss aversion seem to be present in decision-making related to mastitis prevention

• Implications for policy and design of policy related to animal health (and welfare)
  • How actions to improve animal health (and welfare) can be motivated from a policy point of view
  • Insights related to how problems related to animal health are represented from the farmers’ point of view and how that can be assessed