STAYING GOOD WHILE PLAYING GOD — ETHICS OF FARM ANIMAL BREEDING

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Animal breeding was, until the beginning of the twentieth century, a relatively uncontrolled activity based mainly on the animal's physical appearance. Early animal breeders did not really have the knowledge and tools to predict and control what they were doing. This changed in the twentieth century, when quantitative genetics was applied in farm animal breeding. Later, since the 1970's, we have seen the development of new forms of biotechnology to assist or supplement traditional selective breeding. These include freezing of semen and embryos, embryo transfer, in vitro fertilization, cloning, genomic breeding, gene transfer, CRISPR and other forms of gene editing– all of which allow scientists and breeders even greater control over future animals.

With greater control comes greater responsibility and, in modern democratic societies at any rate, a higher degree of accountability. Certainly, the new technologies prompt a range of ethical questions concerning animal welfare, biodiversity and human interference with nature. In this presentation I will focus on the effects of breeding and linked forms of biotechnology on animal welfare and on related ethical issues. In the first section I will describe how modern breeding and biotechnology has developed. In the second section, consequences for animal welfare and the ethical issues relating to these consequences will be presented and discussed. Finally, in the last section, I will discuss various ways of dealing with these issues in the form of voluntary industry initiatives, special labelling and animal welfare legislation.

Refreshments will be served on a first-come-first served basis

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