

This document is available on Gary Varner's web site at: <http://philosophy.tamu.edu/~gary/>, under "Some materials for teaching about animal rights and animal welfare." Unless indicated otherwise, this material is © 2003 Gary Varner. College faculty or other teachers have permission to link to this document or reproduce it for non-commercial distribution only, and this copyright statement must be kept intact.

General agricultural cases for discussion

Beef slaughter

Approximately 30 million cattle are slaughtered yearly in the United States. When it comes to the slaughter procedure itself, the large-scale, state-of-the-art facilities capable of slaughtering as many as 400 to 600 animals per hour are, perhaps contrary to popular belief, the most humane, at least if operated properly. The races approaching the stunning chute can be designed to look just like those through which cattle have passed previously for routine veterinary care, experienced handlers can move animals along without prodding, cattle do not "smell blood in the chutes," and "stunning" is a misnomer for what happens in the kill chute, since a properly placed shot with a "stun gun" obliterates the animal's brain, making it impossible to regain consciousness.

Questions:

1. What would a person thinking from the animal welfare perspective (as described in the "Representative Views on the Moral Status of Animals" handout) say about this practice? Why?
2. What would a person thinking from the human dominion perspective (as described in the other handout) say about this practice? Why?
3. What would a person thinking from the animal rights perspective (as described in the other handout) say about this practice? Why?
4. In your own opinion, is this method of slaughter morally permissible? Why or why not?

Continued on the next page ...

Milk cows

On average in the U.S., milking cows spend between three and four years in production, after which they are slaughtered for relatively low-grade beef. Dairy farmers maintain high productivity by breeding cows to calve about yearly. The calves are removed from their mothers immediately or within days, with most of the female calves becoming replacement milk cows and many of the male calves being raised for veal. Statistics indicate that about one seventh of the cattle slaughtered yearly in the U.S. come from dairy operations.

Questions:

1. What would a person thinking from the animal welfare perspective (as described in “Representative Views on the Moral Status of Animals” handout) say about this practice? Why?
2. What would a person thinking from the human dominion perspective (as described in the other handout) say about this practice? Why?
3. What would a person thinking from the animal rights perspective (as described in the other handout) say about this practice? Why?

Laying hens

Today over 90% of laying hens in the U.S. live caged in intensive production facilities, which increased the average yield per hen from 70 in 1933 to around 275 today. In such facilities, birds cannot forage, flap their wings, dust-bathe, nest, establish dominance hierarchies, or even preen themselves in natural ways; culling of injured birds is economically inefficient, and the entire population of a battery operation is slaughtered and replaced periodically (every 12-15 months on state of the art operations).

Poultry are still exempt from federal humane slaughter legislation and by comparison to state of the art cattle slaughter facilities, poultry slaughter is still a relatively indelicate affair, with fully conscious birds hung from their legs on conveyor belts before being stunned and beheaded.

Questions:

1. What would a person thinking from the animal welfare perspective (as described in the “Representative Views on the Moral Status of Animals” handout) say about this practice? Why?
2. What would a person thinking from the human dominion perspective (as described in the other handout) say about this practice? Why?
3. What would a person thinking from the animal rights perspective (as described in the other handout) say about this practice? Why?
4. In your own opinion, is this method of slaughter morally permissible? Why or why not?