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‘Getting to the meat of the matter’:

Social & Economic Issues in Animal Welfare in Australia’s Livestock Industries

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seek LIGHT

ARC Linkage Project LP130100419

- Chief Investigators, University of Adelaide:
 - Prof Rachel A. Ankeny
 - A/Prof Wendy Umberger
- Partner Investigators
 - Coles Supermarkets (cash)
 - Elders Ltd. (cash)
 - Richard Gunner's Fine Meats (in kind)
 - SARDI (in kind)
- Project commenced 1/4/2014

Project aims

1. Assess Australian *consumer* awareness, knowledge, and understandings of farm animal welfare
2. Analyse the *drivers* of these perceptions
3. Determine the effects that consumer perceptions have on *domestic purchasing behaviours*
4. Explore Australian livestock *producer, processor, and retailer* perceptions of animal welfare and consumer concerns
5. Examine ways producers, processors, retailers, and consumers can best *communicate* their values and concerns regarding animal welfare to each other
6. *Establishing best-practice standards* with regard to industry communication to consumers about animal welfare.

Project approach

- Qualitative approaches used in order to articulate not only perceptions but underlying concepts and values
 - Focus groups and other qualitative methods
 - Key goal is dialogue (not education): essential not to adopt or reinforce ‘deficit model’ of consumer understandings
- DCEs allow researchers to efficiently:
 - Estimate relative values for multiple product attributes
 - Predict consumers’ actual market behaviours when different types of information are presented
 - Choice sets are framed to resemble food purchasing scenarios
 - Respondents make trade-offs amongst attributes using online and point-of-sale experiments
- Dialogue/participatory engagement

Current project milestones

- Stage 1: Understanding key issues for consumers and industry stakeholders
- Stage 2: Understanding consumer attitudes and behaviours.
Part A – Online DCEs (Discreet Choice Experiments in a simulated retail environment)

What we know about Australians ...

- Acceptance of GM is mid-way between EU and US
- Lower rates of vegetarianism than EU, define differently
- Very high average meat intakes – deep cultural association with being meat eaters
- Concerned about relative geographic isolation and effect on food safety and security
- Poor agriculture and food literacy among school children
- Highly multicultural nation
- Rising rates of obesity



‘Ethical Food Consumption’

- Avoiding foods perceived to be morally problematic (negative category)
 - genetically-modified foods
 - animals considered to be treated inhumanely
- Seeking out foods that perceived to be connected with positive moral values; foodstuffs that are:
 - locally-produced
 - fair-trade
 - free-range
 - sustainably-produced
 - organic



Related Research Projects

- DP110105062 What Shall We Have for Tea? Toward a New Discourse of Food Ethics in Contemporary Australia
 - Led by Prof Rachel Ankeny
 - Qualitative
 - Focus groups: 10 participants, 1 hour, semi-scripted
 - “Shopping mall” interviews for lower SEO
- Not appropriate dinner table conversation? Talking to children about meat production
 - Led by Prof Rachel Ankeny
 - Pilot project, online survey based
- Social media and farm animal activism
 - Emily Buddle Honours project

Theme 1: Fluid definitions

- Definitions for category claims such as ‘local’, ‘organic’, ‘animal-welfare friendly’ and ‘genetically modified’ differed widely among research participants, and for many participants, differed according foods and food consumption contexts:
- *“I’m happy to pay the three to four extra dollars to get the eggs from hens that have been looked after rather than caged hens ... [so do you buy free-range meat?] ... No, not so much. That seems silly to do it just for eggs doesn’t it?”*

Theme 2: Not always about Ethics

- People choose ‘ethical’ foods for a wide range of reasons not strictly related to ethical issues:
 - Taste
 - Nutrition
 - Freshness
 - Food safety
 - Price
 - Convenience
- “... you said you buy free range? Is that because of the treatment of the animals or is it because of taste?”
- “Taste”

Theme 3: Exceptions to the rule

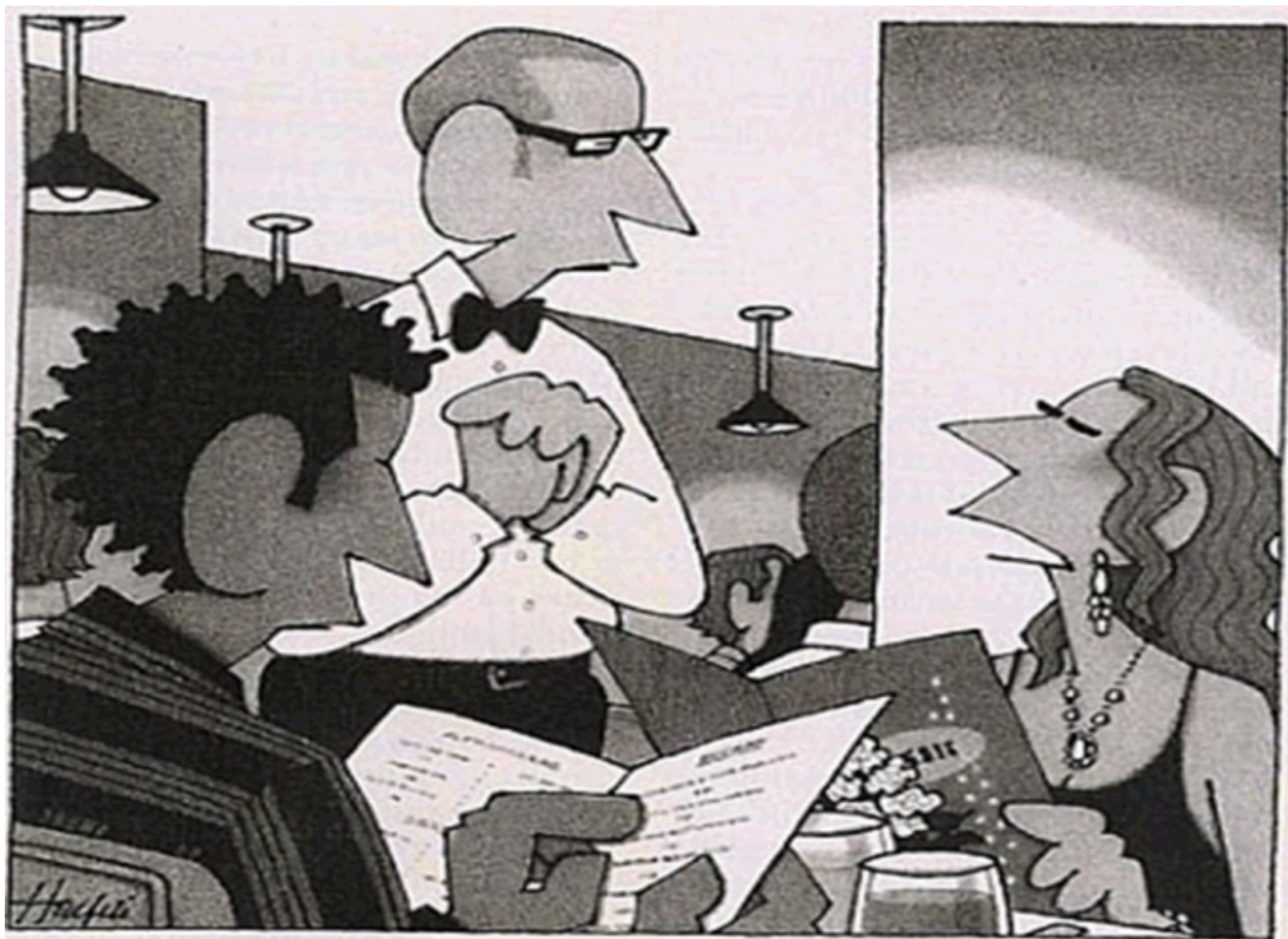
- Most people seem to follow general ‘rules’ when they shop, but because of the complexity, competing values and changing contexts, there are often ‘exceptions’
- *“but you know for me there’s always like a clause...I try to do this most of the time but there’s always some kind of...clause that oh that maybe you know this is the exception in that kind of thing because there’s so many options, when I say sometimes we have too much choice and it does make it very difficult...” (Sue, 2013)*

Theme 4: Beliefs ≠ Behaviours

- Not just social acceptability bias
- Competing issues, lack of information, complexity
- *“... and you just don't know and it gets to the point where it's just too hard, you just buy it, and you turn into a creature of habit ... I just can't find myself analysing all this stuff. I just want a couple of steaks and you give up, it's just too much information.”
(Darren, 2009)*

Theme 5: Trust and distrust

- In the absence of accurate labels and to deal with complexity, participants resorted to buying from people/places they trusted:
- *“Because I think there’s been so many stories that have come out whether its Today Tonight ... and they’ve shown you that they are all caged birds and forced fed and everything else and their eggs are still being labelled as free range ... Just because they’re taken out once a day”*



"Which entrée raises the fewest ethical issues?"