Journalist Fellowship Paper

The factory-farmed elephant in the newsroom: acknowledging animal angles

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July 2025
Trinity Term
Sponsor: The Helsingin Sanomat Foundation

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Introduction

Fresh meat for sale: local, organic, free range, ethically slaughtered, and sold directly at a farm near you. Just one caveat: it's dog meat.

On its website, Järvenpää Organic Dog Farm advertises labrador ham, pulled pug, and corgi fillet.[1] The "farmer" is Mikko Järvenpää, the founder and executive director of the impact accelerator nonprofit Worldshapers; but the farm itself –as you've probably guessed – doesn't actually exist.

This is clearly stated on the website, but it didn't stop people from getting upset before reading that far, not least because Järvenpää's namesake happens to be a town in southern Finland with a population of approximately 46,000.[2]

"I set up the website as a localisation of Elwood's Organic Dog Meat Farm, but I didn't launch it in any way," Järvenpää told me on a video call from San Francisco. "I have the people of Järvenpää to thank for how widely it ended up spreading. Outraged folks started sharing a link to the site, wondering where the farm is."

Järvenpää (the person), originally from eastern Finland and now living in California, has nothing to do with Järvenpää the town – and his last name isn't even particularly rare in Finland. Still, such was the distress of some of the townspeople that eventually first regional and then national news media reached out to him for comment. He said that a reporter from the regional newspaper published in the area including Järvenpää (the town) had asked him to explain himself before angry people started looking for the farm in their neighbourhood.

It's evident that people – including but not only in Järvenpää – are ready and willing to fiercely defend animals when they so wish. Just not all animals.

We assign roles to animals based on their usefulness to us. In Finland and the UK, dogs are family. Pigs – equally bright, arguably brighter – can be farmed and slaughtered in ways that would trigger national outrage if dogs were on the

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[1] Järvenpään luomukoiratila. Available at https://koiranliha.com (Accessed 27 November 2024)
[2] City of Järvenpää. *Järvenpää lukuina*. Available at: https://www.jarvenpaa.fi/kaupunki-ja-paatoksenteko/jarvenpaa-tietoa/jarvenpaa-lukuina; figure from 2023 (Accessed 27 November 2024)

receiving end. Even the most "humane" methods wouldn't pass muster. Although a lot could and should be said about the way we treat all kinds of nonhumans, dogs are not the focus of this project. Instead, I concentrate on animals farmed for food ("farmed animals" for short – though, yes, animals are farmed for other reasons, such as their fur). Their suffering in our society is omnipresent yet invisible, including in our journalism: we ignore the slaughterhouse to enjoy the steak, and refuse to meet our meat.

To find out how journalists might better take the nonhuman perspective into account I spoke to a dozen people working across academia, journalism, advocacy, and the intersections between them, such as Critical Animal Studies (CAS) and Critical Animal and Media Studies (CAMS). Some are committed animal rights activists, others more concerned with the overall health of the planet than animal ethics *per se*; but all agreed journalism is currently failing nonhumans. In doing so, we help maintain a status quo that is harmful to interspecies relations, climate and environment, and humans both as individuals and as a species.

I will draw on their experience and insight to outline a toolkit for journalists who want to do more equal and inclusive work. Similar guidelines have been published, for example, in the form of advocacy materials by campaign groups. My aim is not to speak over their work, but to add a voice from *within* the news industry.

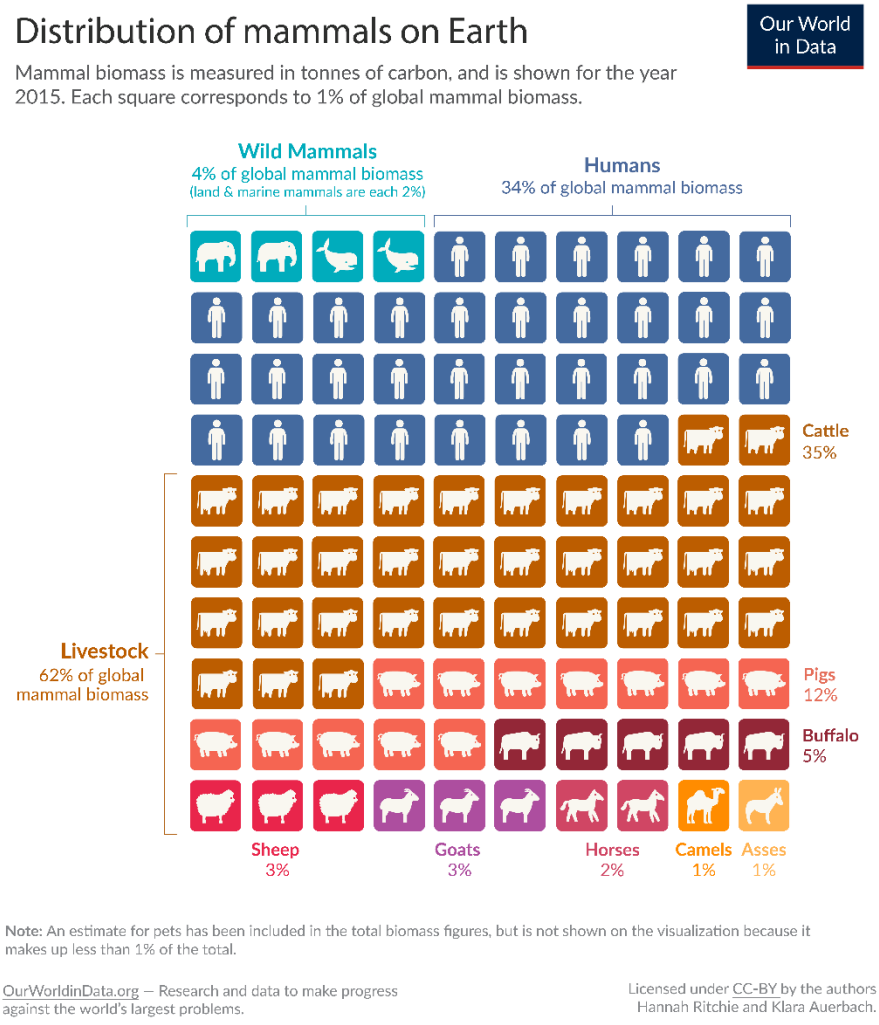
And now, knowing my peers as I do, I can anticipate the next questions: Isn't this activism? Advocacy? Idealism? All things journalism isn't supposed to be?

Silence is, I firmly believe, political and ideological. A journalist's job isn't to take a stance, but it is to ensure all voices are heard. It's not unreasonable to ask a journalist to remember to take all stakeholders into account. If anything, it's our responsibility to do so. And just because we have – in the case of nonhuman animals – failed to meet this basic and explicit requirement of professional ethics, doesn't mean we should continue to do so.[3]

[3] *SPJ Code of Ethics*, https://www.spj.org/spj-code-of-ethics/ (Accessed 27 November 2024)

Animals on our plates: figures for thought

Animal agriculture is an immense industry. One study, published in 2018, estimated that animals we commonly refer to as livestock (such as cows and pigs), make up roughly 60% of all mammal carbon mass on the planet. Humans come a distant second at just over a third, and the rest – a mere 4% – consists of wild land and marine mammals. The same study estimates that the biomass of domesticated poultry is more than twice that of wild birds. [4]



[4] Bar-On, Y.M., Phillips, R., & Milo, R. (2018). *The biomass distribution on Earth*. The Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences of the U.S.A. 115 (25) 6506-6511.

Although the researchers point out that there are uncertainties in the estimate, it still gives a clear indication as to how prevalent animal agriculture is and how much space it has taken over from wildlife.

But the success of animal agriculture isn't measured by how many animals are reared; it's measured by, for example, how many are killed. In 2024, Seth Millstein counted for an article on Sentient that every 24 hours, between 3.4 and 6.5 billion animals are killed for food. This includes, for example, well over 200 million chickens, 4 million pigs, 1.7 million sheep, and over 840,000 cows – daily. Many of the animals killed in the process of food production never end up being eaten: many die on the farm or in transit or are thrown away after being processed into meat, male chicks are intentionally killed due to their inability to lay eggs, and every year, billions of aquatic animals are killed and injured as so-called bycatch – essentially loss of life that's deemed expendable.[5]

In addition to slaughter, farmed animals are genetically modified, mutilated, and abused. Their opportunities to engage in species-typical behaviour are particularly limited or even non-existent in factory farms, which are the norm in many countries: the Sentience Institute has estimated that in the US 99% and globally over 90% of farmed animals live in factory farms, including 74% of farmed land animals and virtually all farmed fish.[6, 7] Although there are, again, substantial uncertainties in the estimates, even the approximate scale paints a bleak picture of the lives of the animals that end up on our plates. In Finland, too, sizes of animal farms are set to grow; for example, based on a 2024 survey, the medium size of a chicken farm is likely to grow from 17,700 chickens to 26,000 chickens by 2030.[8]

However, animal agriculture isn't only killing nonhuman animals. The collateral damage already includes, for example, the exploitation of human workers and harm

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[5] Sentient Media (2024). *How many animals are killed for food every day?* Available at: https://sentientmedia.org/how-many-animals-are-killed-for-food-every-day/ (Accessed 15 December 2024)
[6] Sentience Institute (2024). *US Factory Farming Estimates*. Available at: https://www.sentienceinstitute.org/us-factory-farming-estimates (Accessed 10 February 2025)
[7] Sentience Institute (2019). *Global Farmed & Factory Farmed Animal Estimates*. Available at: https://www.sentienceinstitute.org/global-animal-farming-estimates (Accessed 10 February 2025)
[8] Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners MTK (2024). Farms are planning more investments than in recent years. Available at: https://www.mtk.fi/-/maatilat-suunnittelevat-investointeja (Accessed 10 February 2025).

caused by antibiotic resistance due to the overuse and misuse of antibiotics in intensive animal farms.[9,10]

And we consume these animals too much for our own good: the rising consumption of red and processed meats has major health consequences, including increased risk of Type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and all-cause mortality.[11]

On top of this, animal agriculture is one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions and by far the single largest anthropogenic – i.e. originating from human activity – user of land, causing deforestation and having a significant negative impact on biodiversity. Animal agriculture also requires vast amounts of water and is a huge source of water pollution.[12]

Various studies show that avoiding meat and dairy products is the single biggest way to reduce one's environmental impact on the planet. Meat, aquaculture, eggs, and dairy use over 80% of the world's farmland and contribute 56-58% of food's various emissions – yet provide just 37% of our protein and 18% of our calories.[13]

Nonhumans in journalism: figures, again

Despite how incredibly destructive animal agriculture is for the environment and climate, its connection to these crises is rarely made clear in journalism. In 2023, Sentient (then Sentient Media) and Faunalytics reviewed 100 the most recent climate articles as of September 2022 published by national U.S. outlets, such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. In their analysis, they found out that just 7% of these stories mentioned animal agriculture and that the animal

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[9] Human Rights Watch (2019). *"When We're Dead and Buried, Our Bones Will Keep Hurting". Workers' Rights Under Threat in US Meat and Poultry Plants*. Available at https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/09/04/when-were-dead-and-buried-our-bones-will-keep-hurting/workers-rights-under-threat (Accessed 10 February 2025)

[10] Manyi-Loh C., Mamphweli S., Meyer E., Okoh A. (2018) *Antibiotic Use in Agriculture and Its Consequential Resistance in Environmental Sources: Potential Public Health Implications*. Molecules 23(4):795.

[11] Qian, F., Riddle, M. C., Wylie-Rosett, J. & Hu, F. B. (2020) *Red and Processed Meats and Health Risks: How Strong Is the Evidence?* Diabetes Care 43 (2): 265–271.

[12] Steinfeld, H., Gerber, P., Wassenaar, T., Castel, V., Rosales, M. and de Haan, C. (2006) *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations* (FAO). Available at: https://www.fao.org/4/a0701e/a0701e.pdf (Accessed 10 February 2025)

[13] Poore J. & Nemecek T. (2018). *Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers*. Science 360(6392):987-992.

agriculture industry is often portrayed as a victim of climate change rather than a significant contributor to it. However, energy, transportation, emissions, and fossil fuels were mentioned in up to 68% of climate articles.[14]

The impact on the planet is not the only issue here. Considering the staggering number of animals deliberately raised and killed for food, many of us know very little about how these animals live and die. Animals farmed for food experience significant stress and pain both physically and emotionally, and unnatural and unhealthy genetic modification puts their bodies and minds under immense strain when they're bred to "produce" more flesh quicker for profit.[15]

As advertisers tend to remove death from the consumers' view, journalists could – and should – look behind the industry lingo and expose what is hiding in plain sight. However, this seldom happens. The industry imposes language and imagery that journalists tend not to challenge and, in some cases, those who follow a plant-based diet are even portrayed in derogatory terms.[16]

"Overall, news discourse keeps the public comfortably detached from the unpleasant reality of modern farming methods and its negative effects on the animals themselves," said Carrie P. Freeman, now professor of communication at Georgia State University and co-author of Animals and Media, in a 2009 article. In her study sample, approximately 90% of news stories were found to reinforce speciesism by objectifying farmed animals. She also found that farmed animals are frequently talked about as commodities, and that journalists also fail to take the animal's perspective into account, for example, by taking a human-centric approach with no regard to the impact on nonhuman animal individuals, essentially denying their

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[14] Arévalo, C., Splitter, J., & Anderson, J. (2023). *Animal Agriculture Is the Missing Piece in Climate Change Media Coverage*. Faunalytics. Available at: https://faunalytics.org/animal-ag-in-climate-media/ (Accessed: 8 February 2025)

[15] The evidence is plentiful; a good place to start is e.g. one of the many editions of *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer. You can also visit any animal welfare campaigning site to found out more rigorously researched information, such as The Humane League (2022) *Factory Farming: What It Is and Why It's a Problem*, available at https://thehumaneleague.org/article/what-is-factory-farming (Accessed 13 February 2025)

[16] Cole, M. & Morgan K. (2011) *Vegaphobia: Derogatory Discourses of Veganism and the Reproduction of Speciesism in UK National Newspapers*. The British Journal of Sociology 62.1, 134–153.

individual identities.[17]As Alex Lockwood puts it, nonhuman animals remain without membership in the human society that journalism focuses on, and while they appear as characters, their concerns almost never do.[18]

How farmed animals are being portrayed in the news media isn't just a journalistic concern. The media doesn't merely reflect consensus; it helps produce it.[19]

The power of agenda-setting that journalism holds by default plays a key role in shaping how farmed animals are seen by the public. As has been demonstrated repeatedly, and again by Natalie Khazaal and Núria Almiron, social consent is constructed through language and discourse. In their study looking at a sample of articles in the *New York Times* and *El País*, they found that speciesism – the belief that members of one species are superior to those of another – in journalism can be crude or camouflaged, and there are various ways in which they manifest:

- commodifying nonhumans,
- hedging serious issues,
- employing false balance,
- prioritising human interests,
- neglecting nonhuman suffering and individuality, and
- concealing or ignoring cruelty-free alternatives.

Even when animal welfare is the most important topic both explicitly and implicitly, the dominant frame is business, followed by human health concerns.[20]

Why should this matter to nonhuman animals? They don't read the paper or watch 8.30pm news broadcasts, right? Indirectly, it matters a great deal, because in the case of farmed animals, their suffering is entirely (hu)man-made. People turn to news media to learn about the world beyond their immediate surroundings, and as animals farmed for food are frequently out of our sight, media can be our only

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[17] Packwood Freeman, C. (2009). *This Little Piggy Went to Press: The American News Media's Construction of Animals in Agriculture*. The Communication Review, 12:1, 78-103
[18] Lockwood, A. (201 9) *What would inclusive journalism have felt like for the pig?* Journal of Applied Journalism and Media Studies, 8 (1), 25–43
[19] Hall, S. (1982). *The rediscovery of ideology*. In M. Gurevith, T. Bennett, J. Curran, and J. Woollacott, *Culture Society and the Media*, 128–38. London: Methuen.
[20] Khazaal, N. & Almiron, N. (2016) *An Angry Cow is Not a Good Eating Experience*. Journalism Studies, 17:3, 374-391

connection to their life. Again, choices journalists make about which issues to cover and how to cover them can shape public opinion and influence both attitude formation and attitude strength.[21] The media also has the power to naturalise ideology, in other words, to make ideology appear unideological; and that in this power, and in the words of Alec Charles, "the press might be seen as at their most influential, insofar as ideologies are most insidious when they are least visible".[22]

What we perceive as morally neutral is just that: a perception.

As the well-known animal rights advocate Peter Singer has pointed out, the media is one of the most important ways for us to learn about the treatment of farmed animals. Yet newspaper coverage, Singer argues, "is dominated by 'human interest' events like the birth of a baby gorilla at the zoo, or by threats to endangered species; but developments in farming techniques that deprive millions of animals of freedom of movement go unreported". And because their suffering is largely ignored, "the average viewer must know more about the lives of cheetahs and sharks than he or she knows about the lives of chickens or veal calves".[23]

Underreported systemic suffering is clearly *a* problem, but it is not the only one. In the next section, I'll go through some of the issues that arose during the interviews I held with academics, advocates, and journalists about how animals farmed for food are presented in journalism.

And it matters. As Freeman said in our interview: "If journalists don't do this, we're going to have the same kind of world with the same kind of problems and the same kind of selfishness."

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[21] Valenzuela, S. (2019) *Agenda Setting and Journalism*. Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Communication. Retrieved from https://oxfordre-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-777 (Accessed 14 February 2025)

[22] Charles, A. (2012) *Deer Departed: A Study of the News Coverage of the Death of the Exmoor Emperor*. Journalism Education, 1: 1, 48–60. This study also proves its own point; more on the critique in Lockwood (2019)

[23] Singer, P. (2015) *Animal Liberation*. The Bodley Head. 40th anniversary edition

“A complete lack of recognition” – what farmed animals face in the media

“Udder pressure” is a clever – and no doubt intended – pun *The Economist* used in its story about China’s “unwanted milk”. The story talks about how production has outpaced consumption and how this “leaves Chinese dairy farmers in a bind”; and the paper reports that Li Shengli of the China Dairy Association had called for culling 300,000 cows.[24] But who is the milk “unwanted” by? Hazarding a guess: not the calves, who are usually separated from their mother either immediately or within a few days after their birth. And what’s “culling”? Why not call it slaughtering or killing?

My intention is not to single out this story as a particularly bad piece; it’s just an example of a much wider practice. The roles assigned by humans to farmed animals pay no heed to species-typical behaviours or needs or perspectives of nonhumans; instead, the focus is on the instrumental and financial value of these animals *to humans*, a status quo in which nonhuman life is inherently dispensable and available for predatory commercialisation. This is by and large reflected in journalism. My interviewees emphasised that this isn’t because alternatives don’t exist – it’s a normative choice in line with our deeply and deliberately speciesist society.

“This is just an overlooked area of journalism where there’s a whole other world that journalists could be sensitising us to,” Carrie P. Freeman said in our video call. “And every time they overlook it, they’re just reinforcing the kind of anthropocentrism that is destroying the planet.”

Tobias Linné, assistant professor in communications and media at Lund University in Sweden and the co-founder of the Lund University Critical Animal Studies Network, pointed out that he wouldn’t even say there really is news coverage about farmed animals.

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[24] The Economist. *Why China is awash in unwanted milk*. 3 October 2024. Available at https://www.economist.com/china/2024/10/03/why-china-is-awash-in-unwanted-milk (Accessed 4 October 2024)

“Because I don’t think the farmed animals are really the subject of the news stories. […] It’s news about the chicken industry or it’s news about poultry farmers, but not about the animals themselves. They’re basically just numbers. I think there’s a complete lack of recognition of farmed animals.”

Linné added that, as a media scholar, he doesn’t find this strange – just sad. It follows both the anthropocentric ideas governing our societies as well as the logic of the news industry: farmed animals aren’t subjects with agency that deserve fair representation. Media and popular culture are a huge part of this problem.

British journalist, author, and environmentalist George Monbiot, speaking to me on the garden terrace of a café in Totnes, Devon, had a similarly bleak view of the current state of affairs.

“I feel that journalism on this issue is so misleading it would be better if it didn’t happen,” he said. “It’s telling us a story that’s not only false but leads diametrically away from what we should be and urgently need to be talking about, away from the environmental and animal rights impacts, constantly normalising and sanitising the story we’re told about animal agriculture. It creates a sense of harmony and contentment when we should be very disturbed indeed.”

But *why* are the negatives of animal agriculture so overlooked in journalism? Monbiot reckoned it boils down to what we consider familiar and what we consider unfamiliar. Unfamiliar things, such as nuclear power, receive a great deal of scrutiny, because they involve technologies we don’t understand. Animal farming has been around for so long that it doesn’t even occur to people to see it as a dangerous technology.

“It is an extremely dangerous technology which threatens life on Earth. But it’s the issue of familiarity and neophobia: what is familiar and traditional is considered good and what is novel is considered bad.”

How, then, can we critically examine something that’s been around for generations?

Silence is political

When it comes to the presentation of farmed animals in the media, the absence of perspective frustrated all my interviewees. Many pointed out that ignoring or sidelining nonhuman suffering essentially aligns with the strategic interests of the animal agriculture industry (and the capitalist status quo where both nonhumans and humans are systematically exploited), making journalism biased and one-sided. Silence, then, is not neutral. It is political.

George Monbiot spoke about a very narrow conception of politics, and the enormous silences it produces. People often view politics as something that happens between political parties, but really, he argued, it's an innate condition of all human life, happening at all times and between all of us:

"We're endlessly immersed in politics, and so much of the politics in unexpressed."

In Monbiot's view, even talking about journalistic blind spots is misleading. Huge areas of existential significance are routinely ignored, even if journalists would like to believe otherwise.

"We don't have blind spots, we have tiny spots of light and everything surrounding them is darkness. There's this intense focus on certain issues, some of which are undeniably important, but there's also an intense focus on a whole lot of stuff which is just nonsense. Just complete pointless rubbishness."

Monbiot emphasised that nobody ever explicitly banned discussion of things like animal agriculture or various environmental issues. Only in very few cases have we decided to censor ourselves. The problem is not censorship but omission – meaning we've decided not to talk about it because we don't think it's worthy of discussion. As journalists, we often refuse to acknowledge this.

"Journalists are phenomenally naive about certain things," Monbiot said. "One of the tropes of journalism is that we are cynics, that we've seen it all, we're hard, bitter, and worldly people who know the score, but we are conned again and again. Journalists are among the most gullible of all people, and the gullibility often takes the form of the consensus about what is worth discussing and what isn't."

Many stories, he observed, only become news when they divide major parties. But those divisions are rarer and less meaningful than they appear.

“They agree that capitalism is the only possible system and only possible means of running our lives, that people should be allowed to become exceedingly rich while others remain poor, and that industries which are like a gun pointed at the living planet should be allowed to continue. It’s only a tiny number of issues in which they disagree, and those issues are utterly trivial yet achieve all the media attention.”

Tatu Matilainen, a PhD candidate at the University of Helsinki studying journalism ethics from the perspective of farmed animals, argued that sheer numbers make farmed animal lives a critical area of public policy, and therefore a legitimate and necessary topic for journalists.

“This isn’t just activists versus others or a personal choice for consumers in the supermarket,” he said in our interview, previewing points from his forthcoming paper.[25] “It’s a policy area among others that journalists are supposed to follow.”

And as the law in virtually every country imposes criminal liability for causing unnecessary suffering to animals, what is seen as “unnecessary” is a political and judicial choice – not an unchangeable law of physics.

“Particularly when we talk about farmed animals, we’re inevitably talking about animal policy as well. And if that isn’t recognised, we’re promoting a certain type of animal use policy,” said Tiina Ollila, doctoral researcher at the University of Turku in Finland and campaign manager at animal rights organisation Animalia.

Elisa Aaltola, Finnish philosopher specialised in moral psychology and the co-founder of The Animal Rights Academy promoting science-based conversation about animal rights, said that the talk about animals happens mainly through silence. Social institutions, including education and media, reinforce “carnism”, the

[25] Matilainen, T. (2025, forthcoming) *Why isn’t there more news about animal suffering? Interviewing journalists*

perception that eating animals is normal, natural, and necessary. Their suffering is simply ignored, she said, to avoid feelings of shame and guilt.[26]

Deliberate ignorance can lead to cognitive dissonance and paradoxical lifestyle choices: saying you love animals, while eating bacon for breakfast, and so on. The fact that animal consumption and suffering evoke so many negative or complicated emotions might put journalists off covering them for fear of upsetting audiences, subscribers, and advertisers, or unsettling the status quo. But are we doing our job then?

In our interview, Freeman pointed out that former U.S. vice president Al Gore's documentary on global warming was titled *An Inconvenient Truth* for a reason. "We would like to just use the fossil fuels we're currently using, because that's all we know how to do. It's easier, and you know, making these big changes is painful," she said. "But you could also ask what the actual job of journalists is and what the point of journalism is. It's not just entertainment."

The principles of journalism are often spelled out by journalistic associations (for example, the Journalist's Guidelines by the Council for Mass Media in Finland), and media organisations have their own internal guidelines too. Freeman and Debra Merskin, co-author of Animals and Media and professor of media studies at the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Oregon, have together with In Defense of Animals called on the Associated Press to amend its Stylebook to better acknowledge nonhumans – so far, to no avail.[27]

They aren't the only ones critical of current guidelines. Tatu Matilainen pointed out that when decisions are taken that have an impact on a particular group, this group's voice must be heard – further reinforcing the media's responsibility to reflect nonhuman perspectives and our accountability to them. This should, in his view, be explicit in ethical principles and media organisations' internal guidelines as

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[26] Carnism is a term used to describe the belief system that humans are allowed and supposed to eat certain animals without questioning or challenging it. More about the term in Joy, M. (2010) *Why we love dogs, eat pigs, and wear cows*. Newburyport, MA: Red Wheel.

[27] Joint Open Letter to The Associated Press calling for a change in animal pronouns – animals are who, not a what (22 March 2021) https://www.idausa.org/assets/files/assets/uploads/pdf/openletterapstylebook.pdf. (Accessed 21 February 2025)

well, because “merely following the current versions of ethical guidelines doesn’t make journalism ethical”. He also challenged the moral authority of the official guidelines, noting they’re created by and for the industry without listening to input from other interest groups.

Implications for journalism

General ethical principles and newsroom style guides should explicitly acknowledge nonhuman animals and their perspectives.

This would serve as a reminder to working journalists and as a guide to young journalists that journalism is not only accountable to humans.

The principle should be implemented in practice. Regarding nonhumans as stakeholders in issues impacting them should become standard procedure.

Questions to ask

- Are there nonhuman stakeholders in this story?
- What can I do to take their perspective into account?

Science first – but with context and policy

The evidence of the harmful impact factory farming has on nonhumans, humans, and planet is not an opinion or ideology; it's simply counting. It is so irrefutable that to call it a hoax would be either a deliberate manipulation of the discourse or just unwillingness to see the situation for what it is.

And facts are what journalists should concern themselves with. My interviewees stressed that the role of journalism isn't to entertain but educate and guide. Guiding doesn't mean that journalism should tell people what to think; instead, it's to provide them with the most accurate information available with the necessary nuance so that they can make informed decisions and form opinions based on facts.

Jenny Splitter, the editor-in-chief of Sentient (founded by Mikko Järvenpää), noted that many people don't know that there is an abundance of research on what animals experience. If people were more factually informed, they wouldn't necessarily see the information as an attack on their lifestyle.

"Instead, they would look at it like 'oh well, that's just a fact'," Splitter said. "And that could then prompt them to make different decisions – or at least informed decisions."

But facts also need nuance. Splitter pointed out that it's not technically wrong to say that if people stopped eating beef and switched to chicken, emissions would drop. But that statement omits crucial considerations — including nonhuman suffering, water pollution, and labour abuses.

"And for me, it's more important to be effective in getting those facts out there to the people rather than perfectly including the animal story. And I think it's better for the animal, too, if I can effect some change by reporting on it accurately," Splitter said.

Maisie Tomlinson, lecturer in sociology at the University of Manchester and co-founder of animal welfare organisation Crustacean Compassion, thinks that change starts with the recognition of animals having a perspective – what it feels like to be "them". "They are experiencing these (farming) systems, and there are ways of showing and demonstrating that," she said.

Elisa Aaltola shared Tomlinson's view. She added that human impacts shouldn't only be understood at the population level – as broad, species-wide effects. Individual animals experience those impacts directly and subjectively, too.

"If people are reminded of the cognitive capacities of animals, and the fact that, for example, a pig is intelligent and has a mind, it evokes stronger empathy. They begin to question their egocentric choices and start thinking about the animals."

So, how can journalists take the animal perspective into account? A later chapter is dedicated to who can speak on behalf of animals, but one point worth mentioning here came from Tatu Matilainen: including a scientific perspective in animal agriculture stories isn't beyond the means of cash-strapped and busy newsrooms. Ringing a neutral researcher doesn't incur excessive costs in money or time.

"You don't have to travel hundreds of kilometres from the newsroom to stand in a pile of manure to figure it out yourself," he said. "There's plenty of information available already, and new stuff is published all the time. It's not about embarking on ambitious and time-consuming projects, as it's doable within the standard practices and routines of journalism cost-effectively."

Still, readily available and abundant science isn't enough on its own; it needs to be put into context. George Monbiot pointed out that although not all, some science journalists often try to depoliticise their work, pretending that science exists in a political and ethical vacuum.

"They might report a scientific finding, but they won't contextualise it and explain how it might change our view of what should happen within a particular area of public life. I think they're failing us by failing to take that next step, stopping short of saying: what does this mean in terms of public policy?"

Implications for journalism

Plenty of peer-reviewed animal agriculture and animal behaviours research has been conducted and published. There is no reason – or excuse – to not report it similarly to any other science stories.

As with all science reporting, journalism should:

- contextualise findings within public life,
- highlight policy implications,

- address contradictions between science and current policy, and
- hold decision-makers accountable.

Questions to ask

- Has this been studied – and if so, by whom?
- Are they available for an interview or background discussion?
- Does or should this have policy implications?

Part of environment – but not *just* environment

We've established that, in addition to animal ethics concerns, animal agriculture also impacts the environment, climate, and biodiversity. And you surely already know about the multiple and existential threats the ongoing climate disaster and mass extinction are posing to the health of the planet and everyone on it. According to a survey conducted for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the University of Oxford and GeoPoll, the vast majority of people want their governments to take stronger action to tackle the climate crisis.[28]

In that sense, animal rights and environmental movements might seem closely aligned, making it easy for journalists to incorporate non-conflicting angles into a story. However, there are also fundamental differences.

For example, Tobias Linné pointed out that biologists and environmental scientists look at ecosystems and species-level events, not animals as individuals from a subjective level. This can, he argues, be counterproductive, because it fails to recognise animals as subjective beings.

"I don't think there's anything to gain from linking farmed animals to environmental discourses, because we'd just enter another discourse where, again, animals are there as a species, as part of biodiversity, a part of nature. I want to see animals represented as part of society and social relations."

The interviewees acknowledged the ethical tension – and the reductive framing – that comes with linking animal agriculture solely to environment concerns. After all, they would still advocate for animal rights even if animal agriculture were somehow eco-friendly. Some described the way in which we frame climate change as yet another example of anthropocentrism – something that perpetuates and reproduces human-centric systems.

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[28] *80 percent of people globally want stronger climate action by governments according to UN Development Programme survey* (20 June 2024). Available at: https://www.undp.org/press-releases/80-percent-people-globally-want-stronger-climate-action-governments-according-un-development-programme-survey (Accessed 7 May 2025)

“Nature protection has, as an ideology, achieved great things, such as making people really interested in species,” Mikko Järvenpää noted. “The survival of a species is seen as important, but for an individual animal, species has no significance whatsoever. We lack the understanding of the experiences of individual animals, and that’s what might partially make it difficult for us to accept that they are matters worth discussing.”

Nevertheless, most interviewees deemed it important to make the connection. Elisa Aaltola saw it as a positive thing to report on the environmental and health factors of animal product consumption, but she mentioned how crucial it is to also highlight the suffering of nonhumans, and raise awareness of their cognitive skills and the species-typical needs as individuals.

Aaltola and others noted that showing how nonhuman suffering affects humans can be a useful way to engage audiences – including journalists – who might otherwise feel defensive or disinterested.

“I feel like if you start with journalists by going ‘you should be thinking about animals as this’, they’re just immediately going to put up their guards and think it’s an advocacy position,” Jenny Splitter said. “But even though I’m sympathetic to the journalists’ side in this, I will acknowledge that if you look at climate journalism spaces, there’s less of a resistance around climate advocates, but we don’t have much coverage of the food system.”

Splitter doesn’t believe that weaving together climate and animal agriculture reporting necessarily undermines the goals of the animal rights movement. She used to cover pesticide use, and noted that although farm workers were among the groups most impacted, audiences rarely wanted to read about it.

“But now for example with the make America healthy again movement, people are worried about what they put in their own bodies for their own health and their families. They don’t necessarily like to think about others beyond themselves.”

Carrie P. Freeman highlighted that there are many ways journalists could frame the link between animal agriculture and the climate crisis; for example, showing how mitigation benefits both humans and other animals, or recognising that climate refugees in the future won’t all be human.

“I think it’s up to us to bring other animals into that conversation, because you don’t want factory farmers saying that they capture biogas or that let’s have this regenerative cattle ranching,” she said. “Because if you make it all just about the greenhouse gas emissions and not about some of the ethical aspects or wildlife extinction, there are potentially some ways they can manipulate the narrative.”

George Monbiot challenged framing of “the environment” altogether, calling it totally distancing and utterly abstract. He would prefer to talk about the living planet, the natural world – things that create images in the mind.

“I wouldn’t frame anything as the environment, because it’s terrible framing,” he explained. “What is the environment? Can you see the environment?”

He also acknowledged that animal rights should be seen as something requiring no further justification for their moral significance. Even so, two things can be true at once: there’s a great deal of coherence between animal rights and living planet agendas. “And I think we become more powerful when we unite them.”

Implications for journalism

When climate change is covered, the immense impact of animal agriculture and the food system should be explicitly acknowledged.

In animal agriculture stories, nonhuman suffering should not be omitted — even when the main focus is climate.

“The environment” is a vague concept. More concrete and inclusive language is available – and preferable.

Questions to ask

- Is the food system part of the problem and/or the solution in this story?
- Am I acknowledging the nonhuman angle?

The change can be tiny – yet still we miss the opportunities

Considering nonhuman angles in journalism would require a radical shift in journalists' worldview. "In fact," said George Monbiot, "just getting journalists to see the issue would be a great start." But outside of the change in worldview, the changes to craft required are actually very small. According to my interviewees, just an additional sentence or a paragraph could make the difference.

Animal rights advocates don't expect journalism to suddenly shift from an anthropocentric appeal to an all-animal-angle – they only ask that we include and not ignore it. "It's possible journalists could still lead with the human angle but not ignore the other angle," said Carrie P. Freeman.

Jenny Splitter talked about small, incremental changes. The spots where people look beyond themselves are not common, so Sentient looks for opportunities where they can be found.

"A lot of our coverage is actually based on people being curious about these things," she said. "If you can get them to start connecting the dots, like fish have feelings or fish can recognise themselves, they go 'that's interesting'. It doesn't necessarily mean people go vegan or whatever, but at least they are curious. And we want to give them information so that they can keep exploring."

Tobias Linné and Tiina Ollila also emphasised that, considering the level of today's journalism, the mere mention of nonhumans would be a big step. "This is where we're at: fighting for just getting animals mentioned in stories," Ollila said.

Debra Merskin and Freeman talked about missed opportunities, chances for journalists to take heed of nonhuman angles that are routinely ignored.

"Increasingly there aren't only two but multiple perspectives on any situation," Merskin said. "But the frustrating part and one that wouldn't seem to cost much in terms of advancing the discussion is to say, 'Well, what would it be like to also include the perspective of the animal you are speaking about in the story?'"

Outside of the simple inclusion of a nonhuman perspective, Merskin and Freeman called for acknowledgement or interrogation of whether animals should be (ab)used in ways that they currently are. Monbiot shared their view, emphasising that animal agriculture is among the most destructive industries (or arguably the most destructive) on earth. At the moment journalism does very little to make this more widely understood.

One change Monbiot called for was journalists casting a critical eye on everything they see – something journalists love to claim they do. As a campaigning journalist, Monbiot has an overt political position, but: "In reality, all journalists have intense political engagement with their subjects. It's just that most of them don't acknowledge that," he said.

Elisa Aaltola highlighted the role of the media as an educator. In the case of adults, it can play an even more important role than the education system, which is why just reminding audiences about the animal angle can make a difference.

"When the media doesn't seem to bear responsibility for its important task to civilise us and help us develop our virtuousness and instead focuses on clickbaiting, there's not much hope for us," she said.

Implications for journalism

Not all stories related to animal agriculture and the food system need to *start* with a nonhuman angle, but it's important to acknowledge nonhumans as essential stakeholders.

The acknowledgement could be as small as a few sentences or a paragraph or making sure the images of the story reflect the lived reality of farmed animals.

Including a nonhuman angle as part of the story isn't activism or advocacy position; it's fair and the bare minimum of responsible and respectable journalism.

Questions to ask

- What views are reinforced or challenged implicitly or explicitly in this story?
- Where do I fit a paragraph that takes a nonhuman perspective into account?

Beings not bodies – mind your language

Animals and Media, a website launched by Carrie P. Freeman and Debra Merskin, has suggested for a long time that animals should be referred to by their known name and/or appropriate personal pronoun instead of "it". The underlying issue is that journalists don't acknowledge species bias as bias at all.

"Whereas now, like racism and sexism and other kinds of isms, at least they are acknowledged," Freeman said. "All along news has been patriarchal and they didn't notice, and now journalists are kind of coming around to not being so white-centric or male-centric. Now maybe let's not be so human-centric?"

Merskin noted that language serves to divide and maintain barriers. For example, *managing* the populations of wild animals instead of *killing* these animals creates a distance to what is actually happening. Freeman added that industry euphemisms objectify animals as dairy cows and lab rats instead of referring to them as, for example, rats used in a research facility.

Mikko Järvenpää called for an acceptance of the fact that there are ethical issues in animal agriculture. "That possibly requires a change in narrative first, and a narrative change might require a change in vocabulary."

Changing vocabulary, i.e. talking about animals as individuals instead of kilograms, shouldn't be too difficult, and it would be a way to underline the attempts by the industry to shape the narrative – something that should excite any journalist trying to shine light on any currently invisible doctrine. The figures of individuals and kilograms could still go hand in hand, as it could help audiences understand how much death their diet entails.

However, the vastness of death in animal agriculture can have a blinding effect: Maisie Tomlinson illustrated this with the saying "one death is a tragedy, a million is a statistic".

Tuomas Aivelo, assistant professor in biology at Leiden University interested in multispecies encounters, gave a telling example of how we can see the same animal from a vastly different perspective depending on the context. A cow on her way to slaughter is just part of a larger mass, but if she manages to escape, she turns into an individual. The media will then keenly follow the cow's adventures and use her

name which, particularly if she's able to avoid getting caught, builds a narrative within which she can no longer be killed. The animal has, through celebrity, gained a right to be a sentient, living individual in the eyes of the general public.

"And then she will be taken to an animal care home founded for retired farmed animals," he concluded. "It goes to show how, as part of a population, animals are rarely seen as individuals."

Implications for journalism

Reporters should carefully consider the role farmed animals are given in a story, even and particularly if interviewees are aiming to present them in a way that denies them their sentience.

The language used when talking about animals shouldn't objectify them, for example, the choice of pronouns, numerals or units, or any other expressions.

When writing about an individual animal, take a moment to ponder whether you would write similarly about other, unnamed members of the same species.

Questions to ask

- What role am I giving to animals? Are they just kilograms, parts of a herd or a population, or sentient individuals and agents in the story?

Name the powers

If ignoring nonhuman suffering supports the messaging of the animal agriculture industry, using industry sources as the only expert voice in journalism does so even more blatantly.

Reporters usually defend themselves fiercely against accusations of not being critical or not challenging the self-interested narrative of industry and lobby groups. But in the case of farmed animals, my interviewees said industry sources are often portrayed as experts on animal welfare and even as representatives of animals.

As George Monbiot said: there's no neutrality in either politics or money. Farmers' unions are lobby groups – no less corporate than bodies representing fossil fuels, the mining industry, or the banking sector. Journalism should make this explicit.

"You can't fight the powers unless you name the powers," Monbiot said, quoting theologian Walter Wink. "Unless you say that here is a powerful industrial lobby, here are its impacts, here is what it does, here is how governments bow and scrape before it, here is how we are all affected by it, here is the story it tells about itself, and here is the reality which contrasts greatly with that story."

In the same vein, Sentient's Jenny Splitter pointed out that the industry isn't routinely held accountable, even if some progress has been made. She called for journalists to expose the dishonesty of the industry lobby by giving audiences information companies producing meat aren't giving them, and simultaneously providing alternatives so that people can embark on "a transformation type project" should they so wish.

All my interviewees called for news outlets to have the courage to report on an industry that has immense political, economic, and cultural power. However, they acknowledged that whenever journalists report on something that is as naturalised and taken for granted as farming animals for food, it is often seen as activism in some way and outside of the bounds of academic or journalistic neutrality.

But as has been established: standing up to power and giving voice to the voiceless is not advocacy. It's the bare minimum of journalism.

Elisa Aaltola pointed out that the animal agriculture industry is active in producing certain types of vocabulary, narratives, and imagery. Journalists' reticence to challenge this, or their blind repetition of it, co-creates an unrealistic perception of animal farming, alienating the real subject of the story: the nonhuman animal.

Noora Kotilainen, social scientist and historian at the University of Helsinki, also noted that journalists don't really challenge the messaging of powerful animal agriculture lobby groups. Instead, they are framed as parallel to animal wellbeing and behaviour experts, despite being an interest group with a significant and explicit financial interest in expressing their views.

"It is frustrating how the views of certain lobbyists are so dominant in the media without being challenged. It is as though those who benefit financially from the system are presented on a par with those speaking the truth, and those who have the facts are seen as biased," she said.

Tuomas Aivelo wished journalists would do better than just repeat what the marketing and PR departments of lobby groups say.

"You would hope that journalists had the skills to see through marketing messages, and in this day and age, it's of increasing importance and significance."

Implications for journalism

Animal agriculture lobby groups are exactly that: lobby groups. Their messaging may be factual, but it's unlikely to include the nuance needed to tell the story fairly from the perspective of farmed animals themselves.

Including animal wellbeing and behaviour expert voices in stories isn't an advocacy position; it's the least journalists can do.

There is no neutrality in either politics or money, and you can't fight the powers unless you name the powers.

Questions to ask

- What interests do my interviewees and sources have in the story?
- What areas might they want me to leave unnoticed, and how can they be covered?
- Am I writing PR content for meat companies – or doing journalism?

Talking like an animal

All this talk about including the animal angle in journalism – but how does it happen in practice? How can a nonhuman perspective be incorporated in a story, when nonhumans are impossible to interview?

Just as Tatu Matilainen said, picking up a phone and dialling the number of a researcher or animal behaviour expert isn't labour- or cost-intensive, and new information about nonhuman life and needs and behaviours is constantly being produced. Carrie P. Freeman mentioned that bringing in an impartial animal ethologist or veterinary specialist can be a way to share the animals' perspective that's based on the best available information. Leaving it out, she emphasised, is not an option.

The Daily Pitchfork, a website dedicated to advancing the coverage of animal issues, also underlines, in its "Six Principles of Good Animal Journalism", that the media has an obligation to recognise those whose voices are often muted.[29] It should therefore avoid all forms of stereotyping and marginalising, and eliminate language that aims to "humanewash" or "greenwash" issues. One way to approach this, as Maisie Tomlinson suggested, is to also engage qualitative and interpretive forms of expertise that might not be recognised as science but are nonetheless rigorous and methodological, such as experienced animal caretakers or welfare advocates.

"You don't have to do a sort of *Black Beauty* version of what it's like to be those animals to have an empathetic, reasonably scientific, and informed perspective," she noted.[30]

Again, the problem isn't that information, scientific or otherwise, doesn't exist; it is that journalists don't actively seek alternative sources of information. The Daily Pitchfork also emphasises the importance of considering a diversity of perspectives, although not at the risk of false balance.

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[29] *The Daily Pitchfork's Six Principles of Good Animal Journalism* (29 Jan 2015) Available at https://www.dailypitchfork.org/?p=525 (Accessed 6 May 2025)
[30] *Black Beauty* is an 1877 novel with a film adaptation, told from the perspective of a horse.

We also often tend to oversimplify and anthropomorphise animals, which is quite possibly coming from a good place of trying to make stories more comprehensible and concrete, but may also backfire. Elisa Aaltola pointed out that comparing dogs' cognitive skills to those of toddlers isn't helpful at all.

"Species can't and shouldn't be compared like that, but it's part of our anthropocentric world view," she explained. "We see humans at the centre, as a prototype, and individuals of all other species are evaluated as less developed versions of humans or merely through their instrumental value."

Tomlinson raised a similar issue when it comes to the sickly so-called "Frankenchicken" breeds of broiler chicken, bred to reach full weight within just 35 days. She pointed out that there are things that can be said that can get us close to understanding what their accelerated growth rate and cramped and unnatural living conditions actually entail, without unnecessarily anthropomorphising them.

"Like that's going to mean breathing difficulties, it's going to mean not being able to fulfil your most basic instincts of socialising with other birds, building nests, exploring your environment…"

However, Tobias Linné warned against being too fearful of anthropomorphism and risking making things too complicated to be relatable. He pointed out that, whilst it's true that things can go wrong when we anthropomorphise animals, it's also problematic not to anthropomorphise them at all, as he sees it as a method for understanding what animals are going through.

"We can only do it through anthropomorphising, because we are human and that's how we relate to the world. But then of course we need to keep that in check and increase our knowledge about ethology."[31]

One additional consideration in choosing expert voices is to spend a moment thinking about why some interviewees might feel like less hassle than others. George Monbiot noted that often journalists just take the easiest route – not necessarily through fault of their own, but because they are under such intense time

[31] Ethology is the scientific study of animal behaviour, usually in natural conditions.

pressure. Usually, he added, journalists are not carrying out a sinister plot but rather engaging in "anticipatory compliance"; they simply try to have a quiet life and do things as quickly and easily as possible.

"Generally, the voices journalists represent are those they won't get into trouble for representing," he explained. "You don't get into any trouble for representing the voices of The National Farmers' Union, but you will get in trouble for representing The Animal Liberation Front. So you're very careful to steer a line just to make your life easy."

Implications for journalism

Whenever interest groups are interviewed about animal welfare, their vested interests should be explicitly stated instead of just portraying them as objective experts.

Anthropomorphising animals isn't necessarily a fruitful strategy, but when used considerately it can help make the story more relatable.

Choosing an interviewee based on what's easy isn't journalism, and a system that encourages a reporter to do so needs to engage in critical self-reflection.

Questions to ask

- Is this "humanewashing" or "greenwashing"?
- Would my interviewee have an incentive – financial or otherwise – to hide or downplay certain perspectives?
- How can this be balanced without employing false balance?

But what if I just ate a mozzarella stick?

No one likes party poopers or wet blankets; and that's exactly what the people who raise speciesism are often viewed as. Ever heard of the leftist thought police? A feminist's worst enemy can sometimes be a fellow feminist, and so on.

"How does the left reproduce? By division," said Noora Kotilainen, quoting an old joke. Funny (and on point) as it sounds, it might be one of the reasons people – including journalists – may hesitate to explore alternatives to mainstream lifestyles. They might not have the courage to jump on board because they're afraid of making a mistake, being exposed, and ending up ridiculed by purists' ruthless policing.

Every interviewee emphasised that nonhuman exploitation is part of a systemic and structural issue, and solving it would require system-wide change. Animal agriculture products tend to be readily available, mass produced and heavily subsidised (in other words: affordable compared to plant-based products). Meat is so normal and common to eat that choosing not to consume it can be (or feel) costly in terms of money, effort, and possibly even social relationships. And let's not forget that being able to choose what you eat is a privilege that many demographics, particularly globally speaking, don't have.

Journalists, even if they themselves enjoy mozzarella sticks, are in a better position than most to make these systems explicit and visible. "Animal suffering is too big an issue to be left only to vegans," Mikko Järvenpää noted.

In fact, the issue shouldn't be left to any one individual to begin with. Järvenpää said he doesn't believe in a consumer-centric approach.

"A consumer's freedom to choose seems to be part of market-liberal problem-solving. Just like in recycling, producing waste has been made a consumer's problem, and consumers must deal with it, and the one packing everything in tiny single-use plastic bags bears no responsibility. That's why the change must be systemic."

Elisa Aaltola pointed out that people tend to feel guilt and strong discomfort when they think about nonhuman suffering and acknowledge the part they themselves play in sustaining it, which can lead to feeling overburdened and defensive, even aggressive towards vegetarians and vegans.

Meat paradox, cheese paradox, and vegan paradox

Meat paradox refers to the tension people experience when they feel they love animals but also love eating them, as they simultaneously want to avoid hurting animals yet have an appetite for their flesh. Some try to avoid feelings of guilt by minimising the moral rights of animals in order to continue consuming meat.[32]

Cheese paradox is a vegetarian's equivalent of meat paradox; it's the tension felt by someone who says no to meat but consumes non-meat animal products despite knowing their harmful impact.[33]

Vegan paradox is used to explain how vegan advocates are often admired for their commitment and morality yet viewed as arrogant and overcommitted, as their lifestyle can be seen as a threat to carnist identity, and a cause of cognitive dissonance.[34]

What journalists could do is to shine a light on the origins of these paradoxical thought patterns and help people find ways of living without cognitive dissonance. Instead, what often happens is that media outlets further marginalise veganism by discrediting it through ridicule and portraying it as contravening common sense as well as stereotyping vegans as faddists, sentimentalists, or hostile extremists.[35]

Carrie P. Freeman and Debra Merskin discussed the importance of talking about evolving together and systematic change rather than just asking people to make their own individual changes. "What can be done, for example, in the school systems to move towards a plant-based food system?" Freeman asked. "Or to move away from farming animals not just by saying 'you are wrong for participating in something that's been normalised in our culture'. But as a society, can we move in a different direction that is more sustainable and better for humans, other animals, wildlife?"

Jenny Splitter believes in a mixed approach that incorporates the systemic with the individual. Looking at policies and regulation as well as welfare and labour issues is

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[32] Loughnan, S., Bratanova, B., and Puvia, E. (2012) *The Meat Paradox: How Are We Able to Love Animals and Love Eating Animals*. Mind 1: 15–18.
[33] Docherty D., Jasper C. (2023) *The cheese paradox: How do vegetarians justify consuming non-meat animal products?* Appetite. Sep 1; 188:106976
[34] De Groeve, B., Rosenfeld, D.L. (2022) *Morally admirable or moralistically deplorable? A theoretical framework for understanding character judgments of vegan advocates*. Appetite. Jan 1; 168:105693
[35] Cole, M. & Morgan K. (2011)

one thing, but giving people the information they need to make personal choices – for example, as informed voters – is also important. “We don’t tell people what action to take, but we want people to feel empowered and to know, for example, what their elected officials are doing.”

Focusing on systemic and structural issues shouldn’t undermine people’s agency. Tatu Matilainen mentioned that factory farming in Finland is entirely created and maintained by Finns, and it’s totally in our hands to decide what happens in those facilities. Tuomas Aivelo made a similar point: sure, there is animal suffering in the wild, too, but in animal agriculture humans are solely responsible for the suffering, as we are the ones who’ve captured, tamed, and caged the animals, and it’s important to make these structures and power relations explicit and visible.

So it is important and necessary to make people feel disturbed, not protect them from the ethical issues intrinsic to factory farming. Elisa Aaltola emphasised that stories that don’t evoke any uncomfortable thoughts or feelings can create a false sense of our society and culture caring about animals that is not reflected in reality.

“Journalism should challenge people to think,” she explained. “Unfortunately, it seems that many media outlets these days dismiss this obligation.”

Implications for journalism

Recognise when perfect is the enemy of good – professionally or personally.

A journalists should recognise their biases, the vegan paradox being a prime example. Journalism isn’t the place for trying to clear your own conscience or engage in unhealthy defence mechanisms.

Individual changes can lead to changes in systems and structures, but guilt-tripping is unlikely to attract audience interest.

Questions to ask

- Am I stereotyping or ridiculing lifestyle choices or exploring them based on facts?
- Does this story or angle evoke negative emotions or defensiveness in myself, and if so, how am I responding to them?

Conclusion

Animal ethics is, and has been for a long time, in the margins of our cultural discourse; and this state of affairs is in huge part perpetuated by journalism.

Journalism also holds the power to drag it out of the margins, encouraging a critical conversation about the immense impact our current views of nonhuman animals and animal agriculture have on other animals and ourselves, as well as the future of the planet.

How can this be achieved? By recognising that moral neutrality doesn't exist, and thinking about what alternatives there are. The change can be practical and applied across different categories of journalism – such as recipe pages including a plant-based option – but when it comes to news reporting, simply acknowledging nonhumans as stakeholders and including their perspectives to the best of our knowledge would be a big improvement to the current, pretty dire situation.

When we measure the impact of our journalism, perhaps a better metric than the number of clicks or rage-filled comments is this: have we tried to make the world a healthier, fairer, more inclusive, and kinder place for all of us to live?

We could be making nuanced, in-depth journalism exploring animal ethics rather than echoing lobby group narratives or churning out sensational or exotic animal stories. We can highlight the systemic and structural nature of oppression and the power of public policy, instead of focusing on individual consumer choices. We can advocate for language that recognises animal personhood and agency, moving away from (solely) anthropocentric frames. And we can emphasise the value of science and expertise, creating spaces for discussion rather than deepening polarisation by reducing animal welfare issues to ideological battles.

When cruelty becomes the norm, resistance feels extreme. Newsrooms – and journalists in them – often seem to believe that those advocating for animal rights, or just improved animal welfare in agriculture, hold radical views. But defending the defenceless and giving a voice to the voiceless has never been an extreme position.

If you, as a journalist, ask yourself only one question, maybe it could be this, in all its variations: what does – or would – a pig say?