

Project *brief*

Thünen Institute of Market Analysis

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SocialLab II - Acceptance through innovation in livestock farming

Inken Christoph-Schulz & Marie von Meyer-Höfer

- Livestock farming continues to have problems with social acceptance.
- Clear regulative framework conditions, participation and knowledge transfer are crucial for a successful transformation process.
- Better availability, greater transparency and more education promote the purchase of animal welfare products.
- Perception towards livestock farming also depends on socio-demographic factors.

Background and objectives

The aim of the SocialLab II joint project was to identify the economic, ethical and social factors behind the acceptance of livestock farming and its transformation (Fig. 1). Many works directly followed on from SocialLab I (2015-2019), in which the social view of livestock farming was analyzed.



Figure 1: SocialLab: Social expectations of agricultural animal husbandry (Source: Dollbaum 2022).

Procedure

The interdisciplinary research consortium worked multi-methodically and used participatory approaches with various stakeholder groups, including farmers, interest groups, industry associations, retail representatives and citizens. The research work was carried out by Prof. Monika Hartmann (University of Bonn), Prof. Peter Kenning (University of Düsseldorf), Prof. Jörg Luy (Instet), Prof. Marcus Mergenthaler (FH Soest), Prof. Jutta Roosen (TU Munich), Prof. Achim Spiller (University of Göttingen) and many employees under the coordination of the Thünen Institute. The five work packages (WP) of SocialLab II were processed using different methods (table). The research and participation infrastructure developed in this way is designed to be used in the long term. If SocialLab continues accordingly, it could offer all actors valuable support for the further transformation process.

Results

A unique research and participation infrastructure has been established that enables innovative, transdisciplinary and participatory research. In WP1, monitoring of the acceptance of agricultural livestock farming (cattle, pigs, poultry) was set up. To this end, four Germany-wide online surveys were conducted among citizens, farmers and sales representatives. The results show that agricultural animal husbandry continues to have acceptance problems because its perception does not correspond to the ideal image of animal-friendly husbandry. The current situation is largely accepted, but only as long as there is a desire for change. Potential for improvement is perceived by citizens and farmers in terms of space, exercise and bedding for stable keeping. To improve animal welfare, stricter laws or the use of state funds are advocated. The surveys among farmers revealed a strong sense of responsibility for animal welfare but also a clear desire for stable framework conditions.

Workpackage	Approach
WP1: Monitoring	Online citizen survey in four seasons including 14.000 respondents in total
WP2: Representation in the media and its impact	Panel survey, media content analysis, eye-tracking
WP3: Discussion platform and future workshop	Transdisciplinary and participatory future workshop, online citizen survey
WP4: Virtual Supermarket	Virtual supermarket, supply and demand information treatment
WP5: Real Labor	systematic development and prototype testing of innovative market services in real supermarkets

Table: Work packages and methodological approach of SocialLab II (source: own illustration).

In WP2, a media impact analysis was carried out to present agricultural animal husbandry in newspapers and social media and its impact on the readership. This included a panel survey, a media content analysis, and an information experiment with eye tracking. These media are viewed as one of the most important sources of information about animal husbandry. Sociodemographic factors influence media use and evaluation as well as perceptions of livestock farming. Scientifically sound reporting and target group-specific communication are therefore crucial for a better information base for the public. The media analysis revealed more diverse and balanced reporting in newspapers than is often assumed and a relatively balanced ratio of neutral-ambivalent to negative reporting. However, due to the accumulation of specific media frames and the tenor of the respective daily newspaper, the reporting can appear one-sided.

In WP3, the “Future Workshop for Agricultural Animal Husbandry” was set up as a discussion platform (Fig. 2). Its goal is the transdisciplinary and co-productive development and analysis of agricultural livestock farming from the perspective of all interest groups. With the help of various actors, three central images of the future were developed in different dialogue formats: “Higher standards”, “System change and reduction” and “Alternatives to animal husbandry”. These address both the “how” and the “how much” or “if at all” of livestock farming. In addition to the development of content, the procedural requirements for transformative dialogue formats were also examined. Transparent, clear framework conditions, scientific support, professional moderation and mediation as well as stable financial and human resources are crucial in order to do justice to the increasingly diverse interests and emotions in the debate about the future of livestock farming.



Figure 2: The results of the future workshop in pictures (Source: Dollbaum 2022)

In order to test different interventions (information, offers, price) in the market with the aim of increasing the purchase of animal welfare products, a “virtual supermarket” was programmed in WP4. Virtual purchases with subsequent surveys could be carried out here. The results show that information, e.g., placing banners above the shelves or raising prices for standard products as the sole intervention in the virtual supermarket have no influence on willingness to buy. However, increasing the relative proportions of animal welfare products is particularly effective in increasing the willingness to buy. Combined interventions in the “virtual supermarket” tended to be more successful than individual measures.

The “Real Laboratory” was set up in WP5 to develop new marketing strategies for more animal-friendly products. In this iterative and participatory process, science, practice and society were integrated and marketing innovations were tested in ten actually existing markets. The aim was to increase the consumption of products with the husbandry label 3 in the markets. To this end, two approaches were tested: the “cognitive approach” relies on transparency and information about the labeling of the husbandry form; The “Emotional Approach” puts the advantages and added value of products from husbandry type 3 at the center of communication. The participatory and cooperative measures were implemented iteratively in ten markets over a period of 18 weeks. The result shows that innovative marketing concepts support the purchase of animal welfare products. Transparent information offerings on relevant products should therefore be increased.

Conclusion and Outlook

Without changes in agricultural animal husbandry, there is a risk of loss of social acceptance, which poses economic risks for the industry. Monitoring social acceptance can serve as a guide for political and economic decisions and for evaluating corresponding measures.

Citizens and groups of actors who are already open to alternative agricultural and food systems are in favor of a careful, innovation-driven reduction in livestock farming and the consumption of animal products. Despite the challenges for those involved in livestock farming, the discussion about the realignment of the agriculture and food industry must be conducted across society as a whole and in a global context. SocialLab offers a unique set of tools for future research, participation and evaluation in relation to the social transformation of livestock farming.

Contact

¹ Thünen Institute of Market Analysis
inken.christoph@thuenen.de
www.thuenen.de/ma
<https://www.sociallab-nutztiere.de>

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