



Breeders representations of animals and animal welfare

A.C. Dockès, F. Kling-Eveillard, Institut de l'Élevage 149 rue de Bercy - 75595 Paris Cedex 12
anne-charlotte.dockes@inst-elevage.asso.fr
florence.kling-eveillard@inst-elevage.asso.fr

Summary

Animal welfare constitutes an increasing social demand, and is an ethical preoccupation for farmers. We studied the representations of cattle, pig and poultry farmers about their profession, about animals and animal welfare. Breeders share some ideas : dealing with animals is the main aspect of the definition of the breeder profession ; their relationship to animals is professional, observing is an essential activity for a breeder ... But we also pointed out the diversity of the representations of breeding, of animals, and of practices. It concerns affection to animals, ethic vision of the profession, consideration of the animal needs, definition of animal welfare... This diversity is based on the personal history of the farmers and on the type of bred animals. Beyond the philosophical distinction between the animal described as a machine, and the animal as a sensitive being ; we think that the relationships between breeders and animals can be organised in three dimensions : "the animal as a machine" which is seen through it's productive functions ; the "communicating animal", in relation with the men ; the "affective animal", able to develop a real attachment relationship with man.

1- Breeders' relationships with animal : an ethical question

Between 1950 and the beginning of the 80s, the European breeding answered the main demand of the society : to produce at the slightest cost. Most of the breeders conformed to that demand. For them a good breeder, proud of his profession, reached good technical performances. Nevertheless some breeders were, and are still, uncomfortable regarding the implementation of some breeding conditions which are not compliant with their ethical point of view.

Today, the expectations of the society such as we can analyse them, are more complex :

limitation of the production, quality of products, respect for environment, animal welfare... For breeders, it is not only a question of taking into account new demands but of re-basing gradually the image that they have of their profession, and more generally their professional ethics.

We chose to approach the question of the ethics of breeders through their definition of their profession, their relationship with animals and their approach of animal welfare.

According to the scientific existing studies, it is possible to identify **four fields of definition of animal welfare.**

Biological and technical definitions, emphasize on :

- The fundamental needs of animals in particular, their " five freedoms " defined from the Brambell report in United Kingdom : absence of hunger and thirst, presence of shelters suited for the preservation of the comfort of the animal, absence of hurts or diseases, absence of stress, absence of fear, possibility to express the natural behaviour for the species ;
- The possibilities offered to the animal to adapt itself to the imposed constraints (Veissier and al, on 1998), (Dantzer and Mormède on 1983) ;
- The effect on the technical performances of the quality of the contact between man and animal (Hemsworth and Coleman on 1998).

Regulation approaches :

The regulations translate some of the social expectations and of the scientific definitions. They often impose to the breeders some adaptations of their equipments or their practices. Indeed the animal is recognized as a sensitive being whom his owner has to place in conditions which are compatible with the biological imperatives of its species. These conceptions gave place to the emergence of numerous regulations in particular to the recent European directives which concern at the moment the breeders of veal calves, pigs and laying hens.

Philosophic approaches :

The philosophic approaches deal with the conceptions of the status of animal (sensitive being or machine, free or instrumented). Animal constitutes a critical point between man and thing. During the last decades, society profoundly evolved, conferring to animal, either a place of pet very printed by affectivity, or a place of tool of production. These two visions are widely opposed. They could get closer by the implementation of new models of breeding (Larrère C and Larrère R, 1997).

The communication between man and animal :

Some authors insist on the importance of animal welfare for the own breeder's welfare. Quality of the relation of communication between man and animal seems essential (Porcher on 1997 and 2001). This relationship would be, according to this author, degraded in certain number of industrial systems of breeding.

In this article, we present the results of works realised with cattle, pigs and poultry breeders, in 2000 and 2004. We led at first a series of inquiries (Dockès and al 2002) on the perception of animal and animal welfare by the breeders. We have then realized investigations with breeders involved in quality approaches (Vasseur on 2004 and Pierson on 2004).

2- The method of work : semi-directive inquiries and analysis of their contents

The social representations of the breeders concerning their profession, the animal and the animal welfare constitute the object of this research. We shall consider the representations as a shape of knowledge, socially elaborated and shared (Jodelet, on 1989), having an aim and leading to the existence of social standards (Darré, on 1994), object of dialogue between the farmers.

To understand these representations, we used the method of the sociological semi-directive interviews, (Blanchet and Gotman, on 1992). A methodological synthesis (Kling-Eveillard, on 2001) was used as base to the works. We tried to approach the representations of the breeders through an analysis of their speech, by looking at three classical dimensions in areas of psychology and social marketing (Lendrevie and Lindon, on 1990) :

- **Knowledge**, that is scientific, technical or empirical information which the actors can use to understand a phenomena. For our subject, the knowledge can concern for example the needs of animals, or the rules, or even the expectations of the society ;

- **Attitudes**, which are socially acquired capacities. They refer to precise objects (profession, working practices, status of animal, relationship between man and animal, situation of breeders in the society). They express themselves in terms of opinions, states of mind...

- **Behaviours** such as they are described by the breeders. We shall speak about ways of doing, or practices, which can be practices of breeding, breeding systems, or practices of information...

The semi-directive interview : the principle of the interview, is to let to the investigated person the possibility of expressing his point of view in answer to very wide opened questions. We admit, indeed, that there is a relation between the degree of freedom let to the investigated person and the depth of the information which he can supply.

A sample reasoned to meet diversified situations : through these inquiries, we wished to meet different kind of breeders (young and old, with small or big farms, breeding cattle, pigs or poultry...), open to different representations about the studied subjects. We did not look, on the other hand, for statistical representativeness. We met during year 2000, approximately 20 dairy breeders, 20 suckling cattle breeders, 25 pig breeders and 25 poultry breeders. During year 2004 we centred on farmers involved in quality approaches, including animal welfare, in the productions of veal calves, pigs, dairy cattle and laying hens. We met about fifteen breeders in each situation.

A guide of interview which goes from the general to the specific : we began our interviews with the personal history of the farmers, the choice of their profession, and the description of their farms. We

approached then more complex questions about the representations of their profession and of their animals, the relationship between man and animal, the needs of animals, the expectations of the society.

3- Beyond some shared ideas, four main profiles were identified

3.1- Some ideas are shared by all the breeders

Some of the representations are shared by all the breeders we met:

- The breeders express first of all the fact that their **relationship with animals is professional**. Being a breeder is a profession. The relationship with farm animal is not thus identical to the relationship with pets. If the notion of pleasure can be a part of the relationship of the breeder with its animals, it can't be the only justification of his activity. The breeders also have to earn their living with animals.
- The breeders **have permanent relationships with animals**. They have to be in touch with them. This contact can be a pleasure or a source of difficulty, even fear, but it is always present. Working with living beings implies a strong personal commitment, and a sense of responsibility to their animals which they consider as beings, susceptible to suffer. The breeders are so always affected by the sanitary accidents.
- For all the breeders we met, their profession is characterized by the **diversity of the tasks** and the activities, and as a consequence by its complexity.
- All the breeders declare to **spend time to observe**, to watch if everything takes place in a way which they consider normal. Know how to observe, in particular know how to observe animals is one of the essential characteristics of the good breeder.
- At last, they underline **the interweaving of professional, family, and personal times** as one of the essential characteristics of their profession.

3.2- Four profiles of attitude identified within the breeders :

Beyond these general considerations, we identified four main profiles within the breeders, according to their representations of their profession, their animals and animal welfare.

a- Breeder for animal : the animal is an important part of the life of the breeder

The first profile concerns breeders who chose their profession by passion of animals. They would not have been able to conceive their life otherwise and they see only the positive aspects of their profession. They have an emotional relationship with animal : it is for them a sensitive being with which they communicate and to which they become attached, in particular to the reproductive females which stay for a long time in the herd. They have an individual knowledge of animals. These breeders appreciate particularly the aspects of their profession which put them in touch with the animal and give a great importance to the observation, the surveillance, the manipulation of animals. They often consider that even if their animals are globally in good conditions, it would be still possible to improve the situation. They confer to their animals physiological, behavioural, psychological needs, including the relationships between animals and with man.

They consider that it is justifiable that the society expresses demands in the field of the welfare and that there are rules. Due to their practices, and their relationships with their animals, they do not feel accused.

It is generally attitudes about cattle, and in some cases pigs in alternative systems (breeding on straw or outdoors) having chosen this mode of production so that their practices are in coherence with their conception of the animal.

b- Breeder with animal : breeding is a profession, including communication with animals

In this second profile, breeders did not always choose their profession. They practise it rather in a family continuity and

some of them regret not having an other job. They see positive aspects in their profession (freedom, management of animals) and constraints (working time and conditions, physical risk, uncertainty). According to them, animal is a sensitive being with which they communicate, but they do not become attached to their animals taken individually. They appreciate the technical aspects of the breeder's profession : feeding, genetics... They try to be correctly equipped for the manipulation of animals, in order not to run too much risks. They know the importance of the observation of animals, but try not to spend too much time there. For these breeders, the departure of animals for the slaughterhouse is a part of the profession. The death of the animal is accepted without pain.

These breeders are often satisfied of the situation of their animals. According to them, it is important to communicate towards the general public, by explaining that the breeders do their job well. Some are ready to change their practices to answer the social expectations, and some have already changed.

These attitudes mainly concern cattle, but we also found in this group breeders practising pig or calves productions, involved in quality schemes, or having adapted to recent rules.

So, the breeders of veal calves whom we met in 2004 had to respect the European rule which imposes the breeding in group. Some breeders who strongly adapted their system of breeding explained that their relationship with animals have changed. Before the Directive, in individual compartment they considered the calves rather as numbers, and did not develop particular relationship with them. With the collective breeding, notably in large groups, they developed their capacities of observation, their relationships with animals, and declared that they now feel more like real breeders.

In the same way, some breeders of pigs and poultry mostly in straw or outdoors systems give a lot of importance to the comfort of their animals, and are satisfied by their choice of production because it respects animals.

c- Breeder in spite of animal : the animal is a constraint of breeder's profession

The breeders who are close to that profile exercise their profession by family continuity and chose their productions for economic reasons. They insist on the difficulties of the profession as on its interests, in particular on satisfactions connected to technical productivity and to management autonomy.

The relationship with animal is a technical necessity (it improves the performances), and is necessary to protect from dangerous reactions of some animals. The animal is a sensitive being, who can suffer, but it is instrumented to produce. The death of the animal is normal and integrated into the job of breeder.

The expectations of the society are perceived as justifiable as far as they consolidate a choice of system, and are illegitimate and aggressive otherwise. The rules are often perceived as heavy constraints for technical or economic reasons.

This attitude is sometimes expressed about cattle, and mostly about pigs (in industrial or alternative systems) or about poultry, rather in alternative systems.

d- Breeder for the technique : the relationship with the animal is not central in breeder's profession, but the techniques of breeding are essential

The fourth type of attitude concerns producers who do not consider that the relationship with the animals is essential in their profession. These breeders are deeply interested in technical aspects of the profession. They feel a passion for the management of complexity, and they do not communicate with their animals.

They like what is about technique and mechanics, but also observation of animals in order to identify risk factors and margins of progress. They are indifferent to the death of animal, as long there is no major accident. They essentially take in account the physiological needs of animals (health, food) and assume that they satisfy them.

They declare themselves assaulted by the demands of the society which they consider often as incompatible with the economic management of their farms.

These attitudes sometimes concern dairy cattle, but we find mostly in this group pigs or poultry breeders, in rather industrial systems.

Some of the breeders of veal calves involved in quality schemes, consider that their attitude was of this nature before they changed their system of production.

4 - Elements of discussion

Breeder's profession is defined from the relationship with animals

It is important to note that most of the breeders place the animal in the heart of the definition of their profession. The four profiles that we described above are mainly defined by the relationship between man and animal (affection, interest, necessity, indifference).

This central place of the animal in the definition of the breeder's profession could be found again when we asked our interlocutors to describe their tasks. The observation of animals, the necessity of being attentive to them are systematically evoked as essential element. Observation is often the activity which most of the breeders prefer.

The representations of the breeders must also be situated within the framework of the philosophical and ethical approaches of the status of animal.

They are connected to the conceptions of the status of animal. Is it a sensitive being or a machine ? Must it be free or instrumented by the man for his use ?

In fact according to the breeders, animal can be analysed around three poles :

- "the animal as a machine" which is seen through it's productive functions ;
- the "communicating animal", in relationship with the human beings;
- the "affective animal", able to develop a real attachment relationship with man.

For all the breeders, an animal has to produce, it is its reason for being in a farm. It is thus more or less instrumented. This does not mean that animals are considered as

tools of production in the same way than tractors, because they can suffer and because the breeders try to limit their sufferings :

- Some of the breeders only pay attention to feeding well their animals and to their health.
- Some others have in mind the psychological needs of their animals : to communicate between them, to communicate with the man. They try to respect these needs, by ethical conviction and/or because they think that it improves the production.
- The last ones feel a real affection for their animals, and practice in some kind of empathy with them.

The link between way of production and animal welfare is often evocated by the breeders :

- Some can choose their way of production (breeding in group of 20 calves, pigs on straw, organic production) to improve the animal welfare.
- Others choose their way of production for economic or organisational reasons, but declare themselves satisfied of their system for ethical reasons.
- Others again know that their system is not excellent for animal welfare, but explain that a change would not be affordable
- Some, often in industrial systems, explain that alternative systems are not so good for animal welfare. In fact they think that these systems have too many drawbacks concerning their own working conditions and their economic results.

IN CONCLUSION :

Our work about the representations of breeders about animal and animal welfare, installs the breeder in the debate about his profession and his relationships with animals. It shows that breeders share some ideas (in particular the consideration of animal as a sensitive being), but also a real diversity in the ways of thinking of breeders. The animal is in the heart of the definition of the breeder's profession, and more globally of their professional ethics. It is often

through ethical reasons that they realize or justify their technical system and that they express their professional satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Bibliography

- Blanchet A., Gotman A., 1992, L'enquête et ses méthodes : l'entretien. Nathan Université, 128
- Dantzer R., et Mormède P., 1983, Stress in farm animals, and need for reevaluation. *Journal of Animals science*, 57
- Darre JP., et Al, 1989, Paires et experts en agriculture. ERES
- Dockès AC., 2002, Les représentations de l'animal et du bien être animal par les éleveurs et les intervenants en élevage - Rapport Final. *Projet ACTA 00/12-5*
- Hemsworth P.H., et Coleman G.J., 1998. Human-livestock Interactions : the Stockperson and the Productivity and Welfare of Intensively Farmed Animals. CAB International, New York, NY, USA, 153 pp.
- Kling-Eveillard F, 2001, L'étude de motivation pour prendre en compte les points de vue des agriculteurs, Lignes, Institut de l'Elevage
- Larrère C., et Larrère R., 1997, Le contrat domestique. *Courrier de l'environnement*, INRA n° 30
- Lendrevie J., et Lindon D., 1990, Mercator. Théorie et pratique du marketing, Dalloz
- Pierson C, 2004, Les représentations vis à vis du bien être animal des éleveurs de bovins laitiers et de porcs impliqués dans des démarches de qualité. *Mémoire de fin d'études ENSAM*, à paraître.
- Porcher J., 1997, La relation de communication entre éleveurs et animaux. *Courrier de l'environnement de l'INRA* n° 32. pp 51-62
- Porcher J. 2001. L'élevage, un partage de sens entre hommes et animaux : intersubjectivité des relations entre éleveurs et animaux dans le travail . *Thèse INA-PG soutenue en septembre 2001.*
- Vasseur E, 2004, Les représentations vis à vis du bien être animal des éleveurs de veaux de boucherie et de poules pondeuses impliqués dans des démarches de qualité. *Mémoire de fin d'études ISA*, à paraître.
- Veissier I., Capdeville J., Sarignac C., 1998, A partir de quelles bases peut-on concevoir des bâtiments respectueux du bien-être des animaux de rente. *Rencontres Recherches Ruminants*, 5.