

IGN-Forschungspreis 2016 – G. Busch

Dr. Gesa Busch

Nutztierhaltung und Gesellschaft.
Kommunikationsmanagement zwischen Landwirtschaft und Öffentlichkeit

Dissertation Georg-August-Universität Göttingen 2016

Summary

The goal of the thesis is to give recommendations for the communication between actors in agriculture and the public as well as to show possibilities for a publicly better accepted livestock farming. Therefore, various aspects from this field have been analyzed.

Measures of Supply Chain-Management as basis for changes in the production.

Chapter 1 showed, using the example of the milk market, that volatile agricultural markets put economic pressure on dairy farmers. On the consumers' side, aspects of sustainability such as dairy cows access to pasture are important (see I.1 and I.2). This offers opportunities for the agricultural sector in terms of product differentiation as well as public communication. The implementation of common goals in the supply chain such as changes in husbandry systems to improve animal welfare requires a good cooperation between all supply chain partners. Chapter I.3 demonstrated how information asymmetries and rather poor business relationships lead to farmers concentrating on their own farm goals instead of common goals. An improved relationship, characterized through trust between farmers and their trading partners could lead to an optimization of supply chain organization and to more effective adaption strategies in response to changing framework conditions.

Evaluation of societies demands using scientific criteria.

A negative relationship between herd size and animal welfare level on farms, as often assumed by the public could not be confirmed for dairy farming based on scientific literature (II.1). The analyzed studies in the style of meta-analysis indicate that herd management and husbandry systems have a greater impact on the welfare of the animals than the size of production itself. The public demand to conserve small farm structures cannot, at least under welfare considerations, be classified as goal-oriented.

Challenges of heterogeneous attitudes and study results.

The manuscript in chapter II.2 showed that citizens attitudes towards the separation of cow and calf in dairy farming are heterogeneous. A majority of participants opposes the current practice of early separation right after birth. This suggests a potential for public protests once people are made aware of this practice in e.g. the media. From a scientific perspective, it is currently not possible to clearly state if early or later separation is better for the welfare of the animals. The study shows exemplarily that animal welfare discussions are often judgement conflicts, as an unambiguous statement about the best way to handle on farms is difficult due to complex structures of problems. Different arguments presented for an

IGN-Forschungspreis 2016 – G. Busch

early and late separation do not lead to tremendous shifts in participants' opinions which illustrates the challenge of informing the public about production processes in the hope for better acceptance.

Possibilities of using realistic pictures in communication between agriculture and the public.

Both, the work about pig fattening (III.1) as well as the work about broiler production (III.2) shows that common production systems are evaluated negatively by citizens in many aspects. Informing the public with realistic pictures will therefore not lead to a higher acceptance of contentious production systems. Moreover, the provoked effects may even be contrarily. People with a tendency towards negative expectations will rather be reinforced in their critical opinion (see also II.1). Altogether the results indicate that for achieving a better public acceptance, production systems need to be changed more generally.

Emphasizing fair treatment of farmers through increased prices for better animal welfare standards.

The study in chapter IV deals with the perception of fairness in the supply chain and shows that most consumers perceive farmers to be remunerated unfairly. Strengthening the role of farmers in the supply chain (see also I.3) would be supported by most consumers. Making the public aware of additional costs caused by introducing animal welfare measures on farm could lead to a better understanding in the public that livestock farming is depending on the farmer as well as on economic pressure and external conditions. In communication with the public and in marketing activities, higher prices caused by higher production standards should be clearly connected to higher costs on the farmer's side because many people attach importance to a fair treatment of farmers.