







www.ethicalmatrix.net

ETHICS AND ANIMAL FARMING

A Web-based interactive exercise for students using the **Ethical Matrix**

RESPECT FOR	WELLBEING	CHOICE	FAIRNESS
 <p>FARMERS</p>	<p>FW</p> <p>Satisfactory income/ workplace</p>	<p>FC</p> <p>Managerial freedom</p>	<p>FF</p> <p>Fair trade rules</p>
 <p>CONSUMERS</p>	<p>CW</p> <p>Safety and quality</p>	<p>CC</p> <p>Choice/democracy</p>	<p>CF</p> <p>Affordability</p>
 <p>FARM ANIMALS</p>	<p>AW</p> <p>Animal welfare</p>	<p>AC</p> <p>Behavioural freedom</p>	<p>AF</p> <p>Intrinsic value</p>
 <p>ENVIRONMENT</p>	<p>EW</p> <p>Conservation</p>	<p>EC</p> <p>Biodiversity</p>	<p>EF</p> <p>Sustainability</p>

STUDENTS' GUIDE



The University of
Nottingham



advancing farm animal welfare



STUDENTS' GUIDE ETHICS AND ANIMAL FARMING

A Web-based interactive exercise using the Ethical Matrix

Why bioethics?

The word *ethics* is often misunderstood, e.g. when it is identified with religion or, more narrowly, with emotion, intuition or sentiment. All these *might* contribute to an ethical viewpoint (though many people do not have religious beliefs) - but defining it as '*the science of how we should live*' puts a proper emphasis on the fact that ethics is based in reason and can be discussed openly. Bioethics deals with ethical questions that arise from our knowledge of biology and how it is used, e.g. in biotechnology.

Examination boards are now giving increasing attention to students' understanding of bioethics and to their ability to reason ethically. For example, in the UK, the A and AS level biology syllabuses now expect students to be familiar with *spiritual, moral, ethical, social, cultural and other issues (SMESCI)*, and other examining boards have similar objectives. This web-based exercise has been designed to help you tackle some of these issues.

This Guide is based on the assumption that you will spend three whole sessions on the whole exercise. If it is not possible to allow that amount of time, you will need to spend some time reading the background information given in *Session 1*, below, if you are going to understand what the exercise tries to do. The session is split into three stages (each of which would account for about 15 minutes in a class situation).



SESSION 1

The Lessons of BSE

Stage 1

This exercise aims to introduce some ideas about the bioethics of animal production systems. Biology courses are mostly concerned with scientific facts, e.g. describing the ways animals and plants work. Applied biology courses describe how they can be 'improved' to give faster growing animals, or better quality products.

But scientific knowledge and technology are not the only important factors to take into account. For example, just because we have technologies to increase animal growth, it doesn't mean that it is always right to use them. This is a *bioethical question*. Bioethics is concerned with how we should use our biological knowledge and skills appropriately. These are questions of *value* as opposed to questions of fact.

To show that reliance on science and scientific opinion is sometimes insufficient (or even misleading), let's consider the case of BSE, the disease that infected cattle in the UK from the 1980s. *Read the following passage carefully.*



The link between BSE (mad cow disease) and CJD (affecting humans)

"In Manchester, twenty-nine-year old Michelle Brown died in November 1995 just three weeks after giving birth to her son Tony. Stephen Churchill, a promising student, died in May 1995 aged nineteen, after a year-long illness marked by dizziness and depression. Within a year there were over ten cases of this new form of spongy brain disease.

[Peter Martin, of the *Mail on Sunday*] suggested that the new cases might be related to mad cow disease. ... The response of the Government to the report was immediate. The article was "misleading and untrue" said Angela Browning, the Junior Minister for Agriculture.

Behind the scenes, however, the evidence was being collated. On 20 March 1996 the weight of data was too much to resist, and an official statement was made. The Secretary of State for Health, Stephen Dorrell, and the Secretary of State for Agriculture, Douglas Hogg, told the House of Commons that ten cases of a new form of spongy brain disease [vCJD] were now known to the authorities. It was believed that BSE-infected beef might have been the culprit."

B. J. Ford (1996) in 'BSE: the facts'. London: Corgi, pp. 66-67

For many years scientists advising the Government said there were no risks to humans from consuming BSE-infected beef. (You may recall that a previous Minister of Agriculture, John Gummer, was televised feeding a beefburger to his young daughter to make the point.) Although some other well-qualified scientists were warning of the dangers, their views were ignored.





So there are two important issues to explore:

1. Why did the official scientific advisers originally get it wrong?

Write down your answers to each of these four questions.

Were scientists' opinions wrong because they:

- were not expert in this particular subject?
- were not absolutely honest about their doubts?
- were not cautious enough in their statements?
- were not aware of what went on in slaughterhouses?

Whatever answers you gave to these questions, how do you think scientists should deal with cases where they 'simply do not know' how risky something is?

2. What other sorts of advice, apart from scientific advice, should the Government have listened to?

Write down your opinion on each of the three points listed below.

Which of the following non-scientific concerns should have influenced the Government more in the early 1990s?

- The right of consumers to know about the risks of eating beef
- The fact that scientists were uncertain about the level and harms of the risks
- The political and economic consequences of BSE (e.g. effects on exports of meat, and on farmers' and butchers' incomes)

Did the Government adopt the right balance between these concerns, and if not where did they go wrong?

Conclusions

The example of BSE shows that science cannot always provide reliable answers to our questions, and is often unable to answer *all* the important questions. For example, science cannot deal with important matters like giving people *choice*, or being *fair* to people. Sometimes (as for BSE) it didn't even seem able to protect their *health and welfare*.

So to use our scientific knowledge appropriately, something more is needed. As well as scientific principles we need ethical principles.

Stage 2

In this part of the exercise you will join a small group of other students, called a *buzz-group*, to discuss the make-up and objectives of a committee set up to advise the Government on how to deal with the BSE outbreak. Of course, in this case you have the benefit of hindsight, but the ideas you come up with might equally be adopted by other committees giving advice on agricultural and food matters.

This is largely a brain-storming exercise, so you will need someone (or, better, two people) to write down the group's ideas, so they can be shared with the whole class later.



Just imagine the situation: reports are coming in of a new, infectious cattle disease, BSE. The Government, which has to act on behalf of the citizens of the country as a whole, urgently needs constructive advice on how to deal with this problem. Try to answer the following questions:

- What issues does the Government need advice on?
- What sort of people should they invite to serve on the advisory committee?
- What should be the committee's priorities?

Try to record all the sensible ideas expressed (there's a point for discussion!) but also indicate the overall level of agreement in the group for each proposal.

Remember: BSE affects people (consumers, farmers, butchers and others), cattle, the environment, the national economy and international politics.

Stage 3

It is likely that an important conclusion of the buzz group discussions was that *BSE is not just about cows*. Many other matters are involved.

The framework, called the Ethical Matrix, has been designed to ensure that appropriate attention is paid to the interests of a number of *affected groups* when discussing issues concerning farm animals and food. These are:

- **Farmers**
- **Consumers** (all of us, because we all consume food, and need to be active participants in democratic society)
- **Farm animals**
- **The Environment**: which includes all organisms (i.e. both domesticated and wild species) considered collectively, as interrelated species, breeds and populations

In discussing the interests of these groups we need to consider how any procedures adopted will affect their:

- **wellbeing**
- **choice** and the
- **fairness** they are treated with

By setting out these three *ethical principles* in a table (see Table 1) we end up with 12 cells, which describe what showing respect for the principles means for each interest group. The translations of the principles are expressed in terms that are meant to be user-friendly but are also based on established ethical theories. For example, respect for *fairness for farmers* is translated as 'fair trade rules', while respect for *consumers' choice* is interpreted in terms of 'choice' (referring to the ability to choose which types of food to consume) and democracy (referring to the types of animal agriculture that society considers acceptable).









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 FARMERS	FW Satisfactory income/ workplace	FC Managerial freedom	FF Fair trade rules
 CONSUMERS	CW Safety and quality	CC Choice/democracy	CF Affordability
 FARM ANIMALS	AW Animal welfare	AC Behavioural freedom	AF Intrinsic value
 ENVIRONMENT	EW Conservation	EC Biodiversity	EF Sustainability

Table 1: The Ethical Matrix showing, in twelve individual cells, the interpretation of respect for the principles of wellbeing, choice and fairness in terms appropriate to the interests of farmers, consumers, farm animals and the environment, respectively. For the first two interest groups both impacts and responsibilities are involved, whereas for farm animals and the environment only impacts of human actions are relevant.

Many of the translations of the principles (e.g. for **farmers** and **consumers**) will probably seem straightforward enough but some need further explanation. For example, respect for the *intrinsic value* of **farm animals** represents their *fair treatment*, granting them *rights*, similar to those which almost everyone accepts that *people* have. Not many people think that respect for animal rights carries the same weight as human rights, but a lot of people think that animals do have *some* rights.

The translations of some of the principles for the **environment** might seem a bit strange. Describing *welfare* as *conservation* is the most logical, but some people might wonder why *choice* is described as *biodiversity*. The idea behind this is that the constant adaptive and evolutionary processes of the ecosystem (involving the periodically changing fortunes of different wild plants and animals) should be allowed to follow their natural course. Interfering with such complex processes might lead to species becoming extinct, or extinction happening on a bigger scale than it does already.

Sustainability expresses the idea that we should treat the environment with *fairness* over the long term, not least because it includes all living beings considered collectively.

These translations try to capture in words our ethical duties to the world around us, within a framework which seems highly satisfactory for humans and animals. Perhaps the bottom line is that all three principles described for the environment are certainly important and need to feature in any ethical framework to be used.



SESSION 2

Using the interactive Ethical Matrix exercise

www.ethicalmatrix.net

It is a good idea to read this BEFORE you start the exercise.

In the exercise you will be given a choice of which types of animal agriculture you want to compare, i.e. intensive and organic forms of PIG, POULTRY or SALMON production. In some cases it might be better for the whole class to do the same option, in order to focus the discussion in Session 3. (Your teacher/lecturer will be able to advise you on this.)

In using the Matrix you will score what effects you think your selected system of animal production will have on the 12 ethical principles.

- To do this, you will compare the ethical impacts in the chosen ORGANIC system with those in the equivalent INTENSIVE farming system. The scores will be awarded on a scale from +2 (strongly respects the principle) to -2 (strongly infringes the principle), but the 'don't know' option may also be used. So if you think the organic system is *much better* you score +2, but if it's *much worse* you score -2.
- Lesser effects are scored +1 and -1, and a zero score is used if you think there's no difference in the ethical impacts of the two systems. If you don't know, enter '?'
- In order to score the Matrix you will be provided with information and opinions on the different systems. These will cover a wide range of issues. Because there are differences of opinion (even sometimes about the 'facts'), the information given refers to *claims* made for the different systems. Most of these are backed up by references in the scientific literature. References are available on www.ethicalmatrix.net
- It's important to remember that in scoring each cell of the Matrix you should try *to put yourself in the shoes* of the interest group being considered. So you will have to imagine what it's like to be a farmer in scoring some cells of the Matrix; and, if possible, what it's like to be a meat chicken (broiler) in scoring other cells(!). But, there is now quite a lot of scientific information on the welfare of farm animals.
- When you have finished the scoring, you will be able to remind yourself how you have scored all twelve cells of the Matrix. You will then be asked to come to some overall *ethical judgements* on the organic and intensive systems.

The programme allows you to print out 1) your individual scoring of the Matrix and 2) your ethical judgements.

SESSION 3

Class discussion

Printed summaries of the results of the whole class will provide a useful basis for the class discussion in this session.

**Further copies of the Students' Guide are available at
www.ethicalmatrix.net or from Compassion in World Farming Trust
E. ciwftrust@ciwf.co.uk T. +44 (0)1730 268070**



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STUDENTS' GUIDE

The Ethical Matrix resource comprises

- **Web-based exercise**
- **Guide for Teachers and Lecturers**
- **Students' Guide**

Resource written and produced by Professor Ben Mepham and Sandra Tomkins
Centre for Applied Bioethics, University of Nottingham, UK

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Compassion in World Farming Trust

5a Charles Street, Petersfield, Hampshire, GU32 3EH, UK

T. +44 (0)1730 268070 E. ciwftrust@ciwf.co.uk www.ciwf.org



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