



Project Snapshot: Consumers aware of and concerned about “Factory Farming”



Date: August, 2010

Background

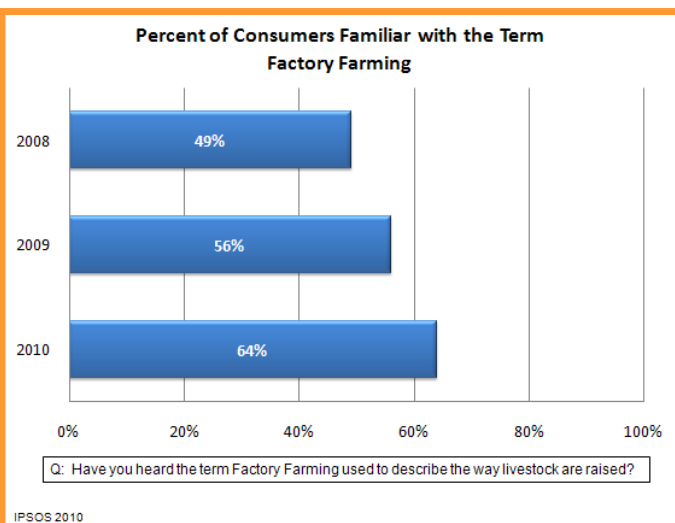
One of the weapons employed by activists against livestock production is the term “factory farming.” The term has been around a long time – it was invented in 1964 by a British author named Ruth Harrison who wrote a book called “Animal Machines” describing modern farming practices in Great Britain.

In the past few years factory farming has shown up with increasing frequency in media monitoring of both traditional and online/social media as a term that signifies all that is bad about livestock production. It has come to connote animal suffering, excessive use of antibiotics and hormones, food safety concerns and environmental damage. The height of visibility may have occurred in February this year when CBS anchor Katie Couric did a story on antibiotic use in livestock production and used the term factory farm or factory farming five times in a three-minute stretch of the story.

The more accurate and scientific term, however, is intensive production and, ironically, it has been identified as a production model that should be adopted globally. The UN FAO report “Livestock’s Long Shadow” which was released in November 2006 has become famous for claiming that livestock are responsible for more greenhouse gas emission worldwide than the entire transportation sector. What is less recognized is that the report also said that intensification provides “large opportunities for climate change mitigation,” “can reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation,” and is the long-term solution to sustainable livestock production.

Objective

Seeing that the term factory farming was being used with increasing frequency to attack livestock production, the beef industry began a consumer tracking program several years ago to analyze effects on consumer attitudes about beef. Recognizing that it isn’t what people *don’t know* that causes problems, it’s what they *do know that isn’t true*, the objective of these studies is to determine if use of this term is causing consumers concerns about beef and, if so, to help identify a strategic platform to counter the concerns.



Methodology

National, random sample telephone interviews were conducted with 1,000 adults in July 2010. A screener question determined if respondents had heard the term factory farming used to describe livestock production. Those who said yes were asked a series of additional questions.

Findings

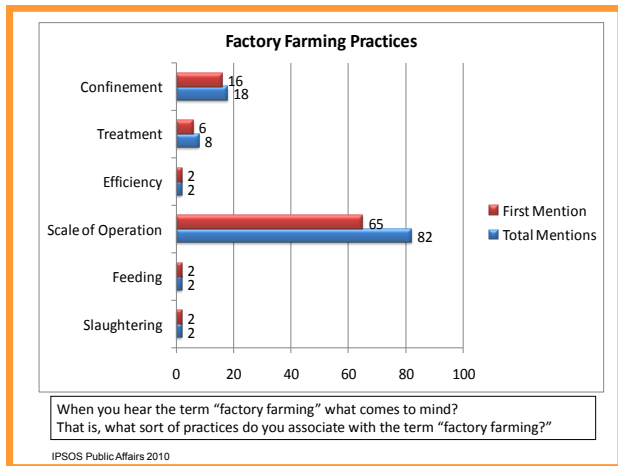
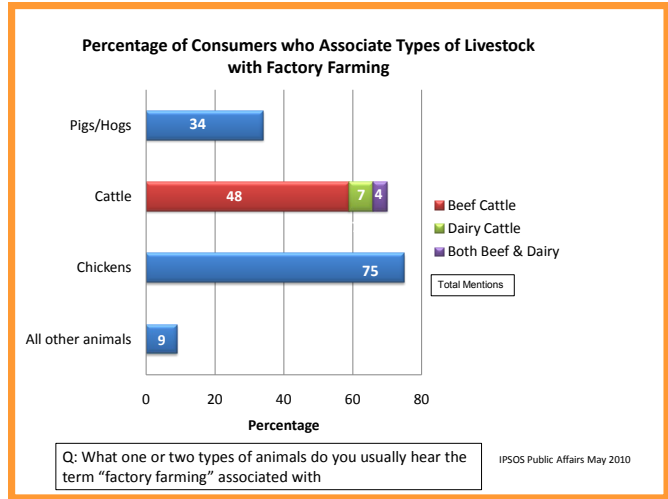
The number of Americans who are familiar with the term factory farming has increased since 2008, rising by 15 percentage points.



Funded by
The Beef Checkoff

The percentage of consumers who associate factory farming with chickens has risen significantly since 2008 but those who associate it with cattle has remained stable. Beef cattle are much more associated with factory farming than are dairy cattle.

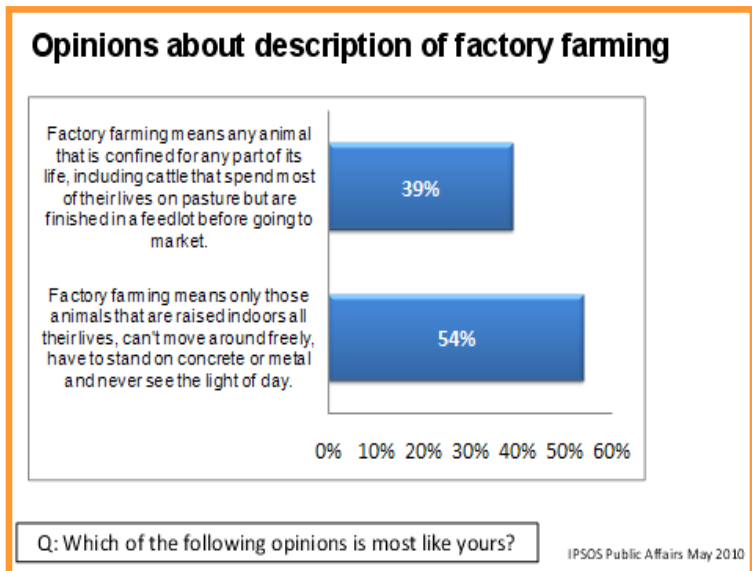
Consumers overwhelmingly associate factory farming with big agriculture and large scale farming. They describe factory farming as being industrialized, using machinery and technology, owned by big corporations and producing large numbers of animals. A small percentage seem to have bought into the activist argument that factory farms are driving small family farms out of business.



The survey asked consumers to consider two 'opinions' about factory farming and decide which is more like their own. The decision was whether they think factory farming means animals that are confined indoors their entire lives and never see the light of day or whether it includes animals that are confined for only a portion of their life – such as cattle which spend most of their lives on pasture before being finished in a feedlot. Interestingly, when these descriptors of factory farming were presented, only 39 percent said that cattle production fit their definition of factory farming. This is inconsistent with the relatively high percentage that earlier in the survey associated beef cattle with factory farming.

This finding may provide a foundation for messaging that improves consumers' perceptions of modern beef production by informing them about the good animal care and the focus on safety associated with the feeding sector.

Of some concern is the finding that well over half (58%) of consumers who are familiar with factory farming believe the beef they buy at the supermarket comes from cattle raised in a factory farm setting. This percentage has not changed since 2008. In addition, of those who think their beef is from factory farms, more than half (56%) are concerned (with 41% saying they have a great deal of concern) about the safety of the beef they buy. This percentage, as well, has not changed significantly since 2008.



Next Steps

One of the major beef industry priorities for FY2011 is to reconnect consumers with modern beef production. Informing consumers about the feeding sector is a critical part of that reconnection process. Additional studies will be carried out in FY2011 to provide a strategic platform for informing consumers about modern beef production - including a focus on the huge new emerging target market, the Millennials – and neutralizing the negative effects of the factory farming claims.