

Feeding behaviour and welfare

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This talk will review recent research that illustrates the interrelationship between feeding and animal welfare. We begin with the most obvious cases of underfeeding and how the effects of underfeeding can be assessed in part by changes in feeding behaviours. We go on to summarize research findings on how the comfort of animals can be affected by the design and management of the facilities provided for feedings. We then discuss how measures of feeding behaviour, including measures of feed intake and more highly derived behavioural measures, can be used as early indicators of illness. We end on a more provocative note, arguing that much could be done to improve the lives of animals by changing the way animals are provided with food. For example, we suggest that diet in farm animals should be used as a form of environmental enrichment, rather simply aiming for a single monotonous ration. Cattle, for example, will work hard to 'sort' specific components from mixed rations, indicating that these components are important to the animal, as is, perhaps, the ability to exercise choices in diet. In summary, appropriate feeding is an important element of animal welfare, and measures of feeding behaviour can be valuable in assessing how animals fare.

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