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Food of Ethical Standards

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VET TALK

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When John delivered the speech he was just finishing a steak and what struck me was that someone in an urban corporate leadership role would see that at the end of the day what really counted was food security.

In this century, food security has emerged as a complex challenge.

By 2050 we may have a population of more than 9.5 billion people requiring up to 70 per cent more food than is currently produced, dominated by diets containing higher quality protein.

Those of us working in and serving the livestock industries know how important food production is to Australia and the world and do promote "best practice".

But it's clear humane farm production has now become a global phenomenon in many developed countries.

Surveys are increasingly identifying a majority of consumers claiming they would be willing to pay up to 10pc more for food that promises to be produced to higher ethical standards, rating this higher than the labelling of free range and organic food.

The increasing competitiveness of our supermarket duopoly has already seen a challenge to the use of hormones in meat and we will be seeing an increasing range of routine husbandry practices challenged in coming years.

Expect a variety of claims of "more humane" or more "welfare appropriate" as the marketeers search for a potential advantage

Provision of pain management during routine husbandry interventions, increased supervision of animals during mating, pregnancy and parturition, disease prevention programs to minimise risk of illness, as well as prevention of nutritional stresses during climatic extremes, such as droughts and floods, plus minimal transport and handling stresses prior to processing, and so on.

What is sobering about our increasing demand for welfare appropriate processes on farms in the developed countries is that livestock production in the developing world so often remains in a hiatus.

In many neighbouring countries, livestock-raising is still a subsistence activity.

As such, it's not surprising that transport and slaughtering standards in such countries are a long way from humane welfare and that when these realities are brought to our attention, they shock consumers.

It's clear the real "GFC" is still coming and is the future global food crisis.

Our challenge is engage all countries where livestock are raised for food and fibre, assisting them to improve their productivity, but at the same time, their standards of livestock welfare.

Our urban consumers may probably never know it, but their future depends on it.

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What does this mean for livestock producers?

In future we can expect auditable welfare standards in farm production systems that may appear as labelling on products in supermarkets and other shops.

But what is "more humane" production?

Most probably a variety of changes to current farm practices.

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