

Conversation with Jon Bockman on July 12, 2013

Participants

- Jon Bockman — Executive Director, Center for Effective Animal Activism (EAA)
- Alexander Berger — Senior Research Analyst, GiveWell

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Jon Bockman as part of its shallow investigation of efforts to improve animal welfare by addressing harms due to factory farming. Mr. Bockman is the current Executive Director of Effective Animal Activism (EAA), an online resource and international community for people who want to reduce animal suffering effectively. In the conversation, Mr. Bockman shared his perspective on the field of animal advocacy, specifically pertaining to farm animals.

Note: This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Jon Bockman in the conversation.

What is the problem?

Factory farming is the biggest plague affecting our world today. In addition to the detrimental effects that it has on our environment as well as the health of humanity, factory farming causes extreme mistreatment of farm animals. While many people are concerned with animal suffering, be it through vivisection, puppy mills, or entertainment, few realize that 98% of animals killed in the U.S. are killed for food supplies, and that 95% of those were raised on factory farms. Since the advent of factory farming, few people are involved in raising animals for food. Because of this many of us forget that farm animals are *someone* not *something*, and this disconnect allows us to ignore the mistreatment of animals in factory farming.

Over the last few decades, the number of animals raised on factory farms has increased significantly. Factory farming was created alongside the proliferation of the fast food industry. The consolidation and commercialization of the meat industry has led to worse conditions for farmed animals, as companies have become more and more focused on reducing costs.

In the past 6 years there has been a decrease in the number of animals raised on factory farms, but the numbers are still extremely high at around nine billion land animals raised and slaughtered for food in the US alone. Polls suggest that the number of vegetarians and vegans has not changed significantly over these last few years, so the decrease in factory farmed animals can likely be attributed to a decrease in demand resulting from meat reductionist efforts, Meatless Monday campaigns, and increasing awareness about the treatment of factory farmed animals.

Another recent change is that several states have passed "ag gag" laws, which make it illegal for workers to lie on their applications for jobs at factory farms. These laws are targeted at preventing people from applying for factory farming jobs for the purpose of undercover reporting, which, due to weak or non-existent legislation, effectively removes the only force policing the cruelty inflicted on farm animals.

Organizations working on this problem

Some organizations that work on farm animal advocacy, and their rough annual budgets:

- Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS), ~\$140 million
- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), ~\$30 million
- Farm Sanctuary, ~\$8-10 million
- Mercy For Animals, ~\$2 million
- Vegfund, ~ \$2 million
- Vegan Outreach, ~\$1 million
- Compassion Over Killing, ~\$800,000
- FARM, ~\$500,000

As you can see, PETA and HSUS are by far the largest; however, they only spend a small portion of their budget on advocacy for farm animals. HSUS, for example, advocates for a wide variety of animal causes, with a large percentage of their budget going towards non-farm animal related advocacy such as companion animals and wildlife. The farm animal protection team has about 10 members, which is considerably smaller than some of their other departments. Still, they've produced some amazingly significant results with that team.

HSUS has 3 staff members who coordinate Meatless Monday campaigns by reaching out to schools and business groups; one of their recent successes includes persuading an entire school district in Los Angeles to commit to Meatless Mondays. HSUS is also coordinating corporate campaigns that target food production businesses and encourage them to remove certain ingredients (e.g. eggs) from their products or to use more humane products (i.e. free-range eggs, gestation crate-free pork).

PETA is an effective organization in some areas, and they are very good at getting publicity, but unfortunately it seemingly creates a lot of negative stigma for people who care about animal rights. PETA's tactics may be partially responsible for the characterizations, which you often see reflected in movies and television, of vegetarians and vegans as being weird, radical, or outcasts. These characterizations are unfortunately representative of how society has viewed people who care about animals' rights, although I am happy to say that I believe that is starting to change.

Farm Sanctuary serves as a national symbol for how farm animals should live. Farm Sanctuary rescues farm animals and takes care of them, letting them live out full lives on their farms. Farm Sanctuary also gives tours to the public, which creates exposure and helps people to understand the intelligence and personalities of farm animals. However, Farm Sanctuary puts a lot of money into caring for a small group of animals, so it may not be the most cost-effective form of animal advocacy.

In addition to behavior change interventions, HSUS and Farm Sanctuary both work on policy initiatives as well. One policy initiative supported by many animal advocates is to eliminate battery cages for chickens, by including such a provision in the Farm Bill. Though little research exists on the subject, there is a high probability that legislative changes could have a higher impact than behavior change.

VegFund, which was founded about 4 years ago, provides funding for activists to do outreach on

behalf of farm animals internationally. VegFund supports outreach, like "feed ins," where vegan food is given away for free in public, as well as programs screening undercover videos of factory farms and online vegan ads. They have provided funding that allows many activists to engage in outreach that they otherwise would not have been able to fund.

Mercy For Animals primarily focuses on conducting undercover investigations. Some of these videos led to the production of a short video entitled "Farm to Fridge," which provides the base for many video outreach and online veg ad programs. They also conduct outreach like leafleting and video outreach, which they conduct at many festivals across the country. They have created a substantial name for themselves through their PR efforts, and have expanded fairly rapidly in the past few years.

Compassion Over Killing also conducts a variety of outreach activities, but also puts a focus on changing policy initiatives. They host vegfests, campaign with companies to reduce or eliminate animal products from their menus, and conduct investigations into factory farms.

FARM conducts a wide array of vegan outreach. This includes campaigns like their 10 Billion Lives Tour in which they travel the country to conduct video outreach. They are taking some initiative to conduct research on the effectiveness of their tactics, which is very encouraging. They also host an annual Animal Rights National Conference.

Often, farm animal advocacy is starting to focus more on chickens, because the average person eats far more chickens in a year than cows or pigs (approximately 30 chickens, 5-10% of one cow, and 50% of one pig per year). Science shows that chickens' central nervous systems and abilities to feel pain and pleasure are similar to those of other farm animals. The average person eats more fish than any other type of animal, but fish are a more complicated issue and it is hard to get actual numbers for fish consumed because they are usually measured in metric tons. However, as many other fish are killed to produce a single farmed fish, the numbers of affected animals from eating fish may be especially large as well. An incredibly talented researcher/analyst named Harish has a blog called Countinganimals.org in which he examines the specific number of animals affected by the standard American diet.

Background on EAA

EAA was founded under the Center for Effective Altruism (CEA) about 1 year ago. CEA is based in the UK, but EAA recently formed in the United States because 2 of its 3 board members, as well as its Executive Director, were based in the U.S., and because the most measurable outreach and philanthropic opportunities for reducing animal suffering are in the U.S. EAA is still a member of CEA. In addition to Mr. Bockman, who serves as a full-time Executive Director, EAA currently has a part-time director of communications, a part-time research assistant, an intern, three board members, and a group of volunteers. EAA is a registered non-profit and will be a 501(c)3 by fall 2013, so it can accept tax-deductible donations in the US.

What does EAA do?

There is little research available on the effectiveness of various animal advocacy programs. EAA is in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of a number of animal advocacy organizations, with the aim of providing recommendations of our top charities to the public.

EAA also features a community of effective altruists who are interested in creating the biggest change for animals. In that community section, EAA plans to build and network relationships while offering a blog and career advice to further discussion.

EAA has evaluated some of the currently available studies on animal advocacy interventions; these were the first attempts at such analysis, and while they were innovative, they had room for improvement. EAA is rigorously designing three new studies to be completed by the end of the year. These studies will aim to evaluate the effectiveness of 3 different interventions:

1. Leafleting
2. Video outreach
3. Humane education (teaching lessons in classrooms about factory farms)

The reasons EAA chose these three interventions is that it seemed possible to study them in a relatively short period of time (~6 months), and because they are common interventions that animal advocacy organizations use in the field.

Jon Bockman's bio

Mr. Bockman joined EAA in April 2013. Mr. Bockman started a vegan food business as well as a non-profit animal advocacy organization (which recently merged with EAA). He holds a B.S. in Psychology and English. In the past, he has served as manager at a pet shelter and wildlife rehabilitation center, and has also volunteered as a humane investigator.

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