

“Mainstreaming” the Pasture-based Approach

Findings from Qualitative Research

September 2007

Produced by the Topos Partnership for UCS

Authors:

Axel Aubrun, Ph.D., Andrew Brown, Ph.D. Joe Grady, Ph.D., Cultural Logic

Meg Bostrom, Public Knowledge LLC

Introduction and Summary

This report discusses findings and strategic recommendations emerging from a research project in the Summer of 2007. The research was intended to help the Union of Concerned Scientists further its goal of shifting U.S. animal agriculture from a system that relies on Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) to a more sustainable approach that uses more scientifically defensible methods.

Enlisting broad support

The strategic assumption shared by UCS and Topos is that movement on this issue, like other issues, depends on broad support among the public, since public understanding of an issue creates a context for action by policymakers. Instead of leaving agriculture policy-making to a narrow group of vested special interests, the intent of this effort is to broaden responsibility so all Americans understand why this issue is “their” issue. In this way, agriculture policy-making can expand beyond consideration of the economics of the agriculture industry to include concerns about the environment, human health, and long-term sustainability.

In order to determine the effectiveness of various communications approaches that might be used to enlist public support, testing with average Americans is critical.

Goal: Creating a new “lens”

The goal of the project is to help UCS and other communicators create a fundamentally new and different “lens” on the issue – a way of looking at it that leads people to more constructive thinking and deeper engagement. Choices about everything from specific terminology, to examples offered, to images shown, to messengers enlisted are elements of this lens, and should all work together to reinforce the chosen perspective.

Research approach

The findings and strategic recommendations in the report are the result of four distinct research approaches: focus groups (24 subjects), on-line questionnaires (137 subjects), telephone TalkBack interviews (51 subjects) and TalkBack chains (27 subjects) – each of these is described in the report. Subjects included a diverse set of 239 individuals from all around the U.S.

Situation analysis

The research established that there are two main patterns in thinking that currently create serious problems for communicators on the issue:

1. The Trade-Off: Americans are more or less aware of certain problems in the food production system, but their thinking is guided by a dynamic that asserts itself over and over in different ways:

The Ideal System of animal agriculture involves small, traditional family farms. It produces tastier, healthier food, is better for the environment, better for communities, and nicer for animals. *But it can't realistically produce what we need* (i.e. plentiful and affordable food).

The Real System of animal agriculture involves massive factory farms. It is worse for the environment, worse for animals, and produces food that is probably not as good or as healthy – *but it is the only way to produce what we need*.

Many objections to CAFOs – e.g. on health, environmental or animal welfare grounds – are acknowledged or even (vaguely) familiar, *but with little or no effect due to the Trade-Off*.

2. Consumer / Little-Picture Thinking: Americans tend strongly to think about the issue in terms of their own experience as Consumers – and specifically, in terms of their food choices based on Price and Healthfulness.

Any communications that encourage Consumer thinking – such as messages that focus on changing *purchasing* behavior based on health considerations – make it harder for people to focus on *production* practices or big-picture, systemic change.

Patterns to avoid

It is easy for communications on this issue to trigger Consumer thinking, or to be dismissed as “marginal perspectives” that don't acknowledge the country's practical needs. There are a variety of “traps” that communicators must avoid (some of which are among the most natural and comfortable points for them to make!):

- “Nostalgia Trap”: Seeming to call for a return to the good old days

- “Enviro Trap”: Seeming to place the environment ahead of practical need – happens when environmental issues lead the discussion
- “Vegan Trap”: Seeming to imply that meat/dairy per se is bad/cruel
- “Anti-business Trap”: Seeming to imply that (big) businesses should not be trusted to do the right thing
- “PETA Trap”: Seeming to place undue emphasis on animals’ experience – happens when cruelty issues are given any weight
- Mentions of food Price – leads to Consumer thinking
- Emphasis on Healthy Food – leads to Consumer thinking when used as leading point

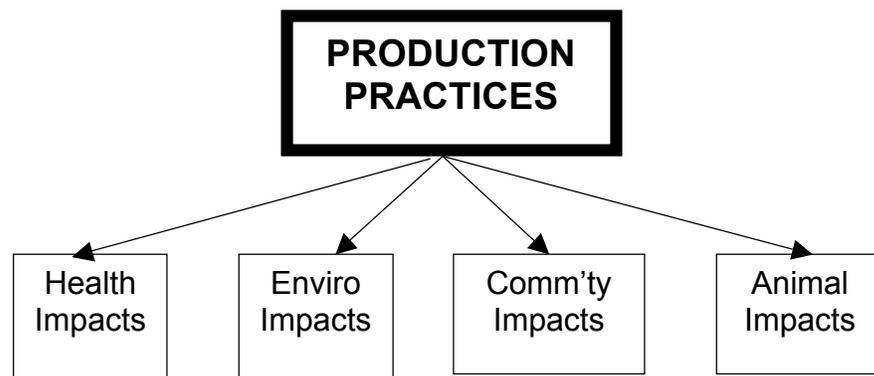
Recommended approach

The recommendations emerging from the research can be summarized as follows: ***Make a practical case based on a positive alternative to the present approach.*** The general message of communications – the “new lens” – should be that:

There is a better system available for producing our food supply, that avoids the serious and unnecessary problems created by the current/dominant approach. The [non-CAFO] approach is better for several commonsense reasons: ... It would be irresponsible and foolish not to move to the new system.

There are several general principles and specific tools that will help communicators establish this lens.

Practices as the Organizing Idea: Rather than focusing on any *specific problem* created by CAFOs, communicators should organize the discussion around *practices* – how they differ and why it matters.

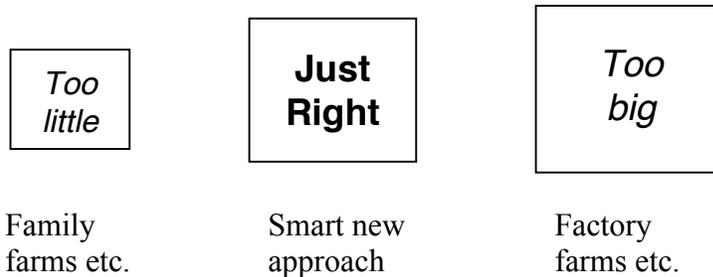


Communicators should also focus on *practical* (vs. “moral”) arguments, and *solutions* as much as or more than problems. The non-CAFO approach should be framed as one that is *already successful* and one that should soon be the *mainstream* approach.

Messengers should reflect the practical and positive perspective – scientists, farmers and even economists are naturally more effective than environmentalists and animal rights advocates, for instance.

Creating an Opening: The “Goldilocks Principle”: Since Americans’ sense that they “get” how this issue works (i.e. the Trade-Off), communicators must find ways of quickly opening listeners up to new perspectives.

One effective way is by invoking a familiar idea: Sometimes, things can be either Too Little, Just Right, or Too Big – the Ideal System includes farms that are (supposedly) too small to provide for our needs, while the Real System creates practical problems of other kinds (e.g. costs and inefficiencies):



This idea, expressed in terms of a “Goldilocks Principle,” proved to be a clear, effective and memorable message, particularly when framed as an *economic* argument.

Filling in the picture: “Smart Pasture Operations”: The most effective approach to explaining *why* non-CAFO operations are better than CAFOs – and why CAFOs create problems that are both *unacceptable* and *avoidable* – was to offer a clear, concrete and coherent picture of the alternative.

The phrase “Smart Pasture Operation” proved to be an effective label for operations that have three key characteristics:

Less Crowded
Less Massive
Pasture-based

When presented as a unified, organizing image, this idea effectively persuaded people that “SPO”s are a smart and practical alternative to CAFOs, with a number of clear and specific advantages, such as:

Less Crowded	→	Less disease; fewer antibiotics
Less Massive	→	No waste lagoons poisoning the surroundings
Pasture-based	→	“Free” food; healthier animals; healthier food

Importantly, the idea that SPOs work *with rather than against natural systems* (i.e. animals’ natural diets and routines, the ability of land and water to absorb and filter a reasonable quantity of waste; etc.) was very effective in the context of this concrete vision. (This same principle was ineffective as a *leading idea*, due to the Enviro Trap).

Communicators should use these specific subpoints in the service of explaining the overall superiority of the SPO approach.

Values and Tone:

Advocates on many issues assume it is necessary to shock or shame the public into action. On this issue, however, it is clear that people resist information that undermines their confidence in food. Instead, the tone of the conversation needs to be very pragmatic and measured. The motivation for public action comes from associating this issue with very powerful values such as Responsibility (to fix a system gone wrong) and Stewardship of the Earth for future generations.

Using the Term “CAFO”:

The project included specific attention to the terms that should be used for CAFO and non-CAFO facilities. The research led to the conclusion that CAFO (spelled out on first reference) is more effective than other possible terms – including Factory Farm or Animal Factory.

A “Factory Farm” is perceived as less dirty, healthier, more humane, more desirable overall than a CAFO (presumably because of the word “farm”). “Factory Farm” captures the public’s current perception of a generally unpleasant but acceptable and necessary way of providing for contemporary needs – CAFO helps them perceive that the problem is worse than they thought.

An “Animal Factory” is primarily understood as a breeding place.

CAFO also has the advantage of being a “neutral” term that insiders are comfortable with.

Finally, note that if communicators are comfortable spelling the term out as *Confined Animal Feeding Operation*, the connotations are even more accurate (i.e. negative).

Research Approach

In this project, a diverse set of 239 subjects from all around the U.S. took part in four distinct research approaches: focus groups (24 subjects), on-line questionnaires (137 subjects), telephone TalkBack interviews (51 subjects) and TalkBack chains (27 subjects).

Focus groups

Four focus group sessions were conducted in two locations – Des Moines, Iowa (July 9, 2007) and Charlotte, North Carolina (July 26, 2007). The research team chose to conduct focus groups in North Carolina and Iowa because they are two states with CAFO experience that are directly affected by provisions of the Farm Bill. The Congressional representatives from these states are highly involved in agriculture policy-making, so research in these locations could help the research team understand the constituent views that influence key policymakers.

All 24 focus group participants were screened to meet an engaged citizen profile, meaning they are registered to vote, read the newspaper frequently, and are involved in community organizations. The focus groups were each two hours in length and were moderated by Meg Bostrom of Public Knowledge.

During the focus groups, respondents were exposed to a number of communications approaches to determine how the course of conversation shifts when a particular lens is brought to the issue. The test materials were substantially revised between the Iowa and North Carolina groups. Both focus group guides are included in the Appendix.

Online term-testing

21 terms were tested in a series of online surveys (10 terms for CAFOs, 11 for non-CAFOs).

Each survey tested a combination of 4 or 5 terms. Subjects were presented with terms that were not defined, but only identified as various places where food is produced. They were then asked to respond to an open-ended question in order to gauge their initial reactions:

For each of the following places, please write a few notes about what you picture, what you imagine it's like, what happens there, and how it's different from the others.

They were also asked to rank or contrast the terms based on various criteria:

- Rank these places in terms of which ones would probably create the healthiest food.
- Rank these places in terms of how profitable / economically competitive they are likely to be.
- Which of these kinds of places do you think would produce the largest and most reliable food supply?
- How do you think these places would affect the environment around them?
- From where would you most prefer to buy your own food?
- Is the food more likely to be cheaper or more expensive from each of these places?
- Which is the most modern and up-to-date method of producing meat?

A diverse group of 137 subjects from around the country participated in the online surveys.

TalkBack Interviews

“TalkBack” testing allows the researchers to judge whether particular terms and concepts have the potential to enter public discourse and to have positive impacts on thinking.

For the present project, a diverse group of 51 subjects participated in one-on-one phone calls, in which they were first presented with a brief explanatory text (roughly 100-150 words) offering a new way to think about the topic. Measures of the effectiveness of a text include subjects’ ability to explain, use and repeat the central concepts, details and language of the text. Overall, the testing is designed to assess whether the concept has the capacity to become an organizing principle for thinking and communicating about the topic.

The TalkBack interviewing for this project involved 7 different explanatory texts, similar in form to the one below:

PASTURE-BASED FARMING may be the wave of the future. Industrial production of our meat, eggs, poultry and dairy products has not only left many rural areas in decline, but it’s had terrible effects on the environment and on

human health, and it's lowering the quality of our food supply. It turns out that by switching to pasture-based farming we solve many of the worst problems. Pasture-based farmers need fewer antibiotics and hormones, because pasture-raised animals tend to be healthier. For farmers and their neighbors there is less exposure to airborne hazards, and fewer problems with air and water pollution. In fact, well-managed pastures improve soil quality and are important part of the rural landscape. Consumers benefit from less exposure to antibiotic-resistant microbes, more varied and better tasting products, and of course, they benefit from the fact that pasture-based farming causes less environmental damage in general.

Subjects were then asked two questions for discussion, such as "What would be one or two advantages of an approach like this?" Finally, they were asked to repeat back the original paragraph as best they could.

TalkBack "Chains"

A small number of the subjects (27) participated in TalkBack "Chains," conducted by phone. In this exercise, a subject hears a paragraph like the one above, and is then asked to pass it along to a new subject who is brought into the conversation. The second subject then passes it along to a third subject. This method represents an even more difficult test for any potential message than the TalkBack interviews. Information tends to degrade quickly, and conversations tend to wander to irrelevant or counterproductive takes on the issue. When a message is performing well, the central ideas are preserved, and sometimes even expressed *more* clearly by later subjects in the chain, who have grasped the central idea well.

In the next section we turn to research findings regarding the public's current thinking about CAFOs and related topics.

Situation Analysis

"The Trade-off"

One of the key dynamics in Americans' thinking related to CAFOs involves *trade-offs* between some methods of producing foods and others. This dynamic has critically important consequences for communications on the issue.

Many Americans can cite a number of concerns about food quality, including concerns about the consequences of growth hormones and antibiotic overuse, and the frequency of food-born illness.

However, awareness of these problems does not cause Americans to fundamentally question the current food production system. Instead, the key dynamic in their thinking, when they think about the question at all, can be summarized in terms of a set of Trade-offs between How Food Would *Ideally* Be Produced and How Food is *Really* Produced. Average Americans have approximate mental pictures of each of these approaches:

The *Ideal* picture includes small, local, traditional, family-operated, even organic farms.

The “*Real*” picture (which is rather vague and distorted – exaggerating some problems and overlooking others) is about industrialized food production, where all food basically comes from “factories.”

The following are some of the associations people have with the two approaches:

Ideal	Real
- <i>Healthier food</i>	- Less healthy food
- <i>Tastier food</i>	- Less tasty food
- <i>Better for the environment</i>	- Worse for the environment
- <i>Nicer for animals</i>	- Not as nice for animals
- Less reliable as a source of food for the country	- <i>More reliable as a source of food for the country</i>
- Expensive food	- <i>Less expensive food</i>

In short, Americans are happy to acknowledge problems with current approaches to producing food (including “factory farming”), but don’t see that there are realistic alternatives:

The Ideal system is wonderful – except that it can't realistically create a plentiful and affordable food supply.

The Real system stinks (literally) – but is the only approach that “works.”

Americans regard certain general trends such as industrialization as inevitable and positive overall, and are resigned to the trade-offs (dirtier environment, food that isn't as tasty or healthy, loss of traditional farming, etc.) (See “Not While I'm Eating,” by Cultural Logic¹).

Implications

Keeping this key dynamic in mind is critical when considering various possible communication approaches because failing to address it leads to communications that have no useful effect on average people's thinking.

Awareness is not enough.

This is one of the most immediate implications of the Trade-Off. Many Americans are already more or less aware of (certain) problems relating to meat/dairy production – but this awareness doesn't lead them to the right conclusions, choices, etc.

Continuing to reinforce the same advantages/disadvantages people are already familiar with – without providing fundamentally new ways of thinking about the issue – is likely to leave the issue in more or less the same place it is now.

Addressing the Trade-Off

When it comes to addressing the Trade-Off, there are various possible approaches, including:

- Provide a new understanding of the problems with the CAFO approach – including why/how they come about – so that they are seen as *unacceptable rather than acceptable*, and *avoidable rather than unavoidable*.
- Provide a new understanding of the advantages of the non-CAFO approach, so that it is seen as *realistically achievable*, and even *imperative*.

¹ Not while I'm eating: How and why Americans don't think about food systems. Cultural Logic. June 2005. Commissioned by the FrameWorks Institute for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

- Minimize the power of the Trade Off dynamic by presenting the non-CAFO approach as a *practical solution to avoidable problems*

In this project we have explored all these approaches.

Production (Big-Picture) vs. Consumer (Little-Picture) Thinking

For a variety of reasons, it is easiest for people to think in terms of personal, everyday experience, rather than in terms of abstractions, systems, etc.

On any issue, once this “Little Picture” thinking is triggered, it is hard for people to shift their focus from the everyday experience and choices of individuals, to big-picture perspectives – including policy approaches, systemic changes, and so forth.

On the CAFO issue, the main Little Picture trap is Consumer thinking – i.e. a focus on the food choices made by individuals, and particularly, choices based on Price or Health. Once people are thinking in terms of the Prices they pay at the grocery store, or in terms of making Healthy Choices regarding their own diet, it is much harder for them to focus on big-picture perspectives, and on how food is *produced*.

There are several reasons why Consumer thinking is especially counterproductive on this issue, including:

- Lots of “Choices” Already

Americans believe that organic and other “alternative” products exist, if people are willing to pay the extra money – the problem is already “solved,” with no need to think about systemic changes.

- The Consumer-Driven Market

Americans have a strong prejudice that products are on the shelves *because consumers want them there*. From the Consumer perspective, it is hard for people to think about how our food system limits their options.

- The Importance of Price

Price is a key factor from the Consumer perspective, and it is difficult for non-CAFO approaches to compete with the current system on this playing field.

Implications

Many communications approaches can trigger Consumer / Little Picture thinking – some of the recommendations presented here are aimed at avoiding this trap.

General Recommendations

We now turn to Recommendations emerging from the empirical testing of different approaches to advance this conversation.

Patterns to Avoid

The research has established a number of general principles regarding communication patterns that are important to avoid – “Traps” that can quickly derail communications.

“Marginal Perspective” Traps – Ignoring the Trade- Off

Communicators should avoid the following patterns, each of which is easily pigeonholed as a Marginal Perspective, that ignores our practical needs and *doesn't deal with the Trade-Off*.

Be careful to avoid the suggestion that this is about “returning to the past.”
(Nostalgia Trap)

This perspective ignores practical need and doesn't deal with the Trade-Off. Instead, treat the non-CAFO approach as the future.

Don't lead with environmental arguments. (Enviro Trap)

Despite the American public's overall pro-environment sentiments, heavily environmental messages on this topic can easily sound marginal and unrealistic (in particular, they can feed into and reinforce the Trade-Off dynamic). Instead, treat environmental points as explanatory points – see Specific Recommendations.

Be very careful not to imply that meat/dairy per se is bad or cruel. (Vegan Trap)

This stance (even if accidental) seems to ignore the practical reality that Americans will continue to demand a supply of these food products. Instead, recognize that maintaining a high level of production is a prerequisite for any system to replace the current one.

Don't implicate corporate greed directly. (Anti-business Trap)

People will draw this inference themselves if so inclined. If communicators focus on this factor, their messages can easily be dismissed, since Americans see big businesses as an inevitable and mostly positive feature of modern life. Instead, focus on *particular production practices* – see Specific Recommendations.

Don't mention cruelty. ("PETA" Trap)

This perspective does not seem to deal with the Trade-Off, and can also damage credibility. Instead, let people draw the inference for themselves. Messages on this topic can also be so viscerally affecting that they side-track the discussion without changing anyone's mind.

Consumer / Little-Picture Traps

Communicators should avoid the following patterns, each of which is likely to make it harder to focus on big-picture change, by triggering a Little-Picture / Consumer perspective.

Don't refer to food prices.

Even if it is possible that non-CAFO approaches can lead to inexpensive food, references to price give an automatic advantage to the current system (which is a known quantity), and also encourage listeners to think in terms of personal choice, as opposed to production.

Don't lead with a discussion of healthy food.

Discussion of this topic too easily leads listeners down wrong paths, e.g. thinking about individual choices, or about the need for more inspections.

Of course cost and health are important considerations and need to be included in the conversation. Our point here is that a focus on the consumer perspective of food *prices* (as opposed to production costs in a broad sense), or healthy food, is less productive in building support for systemic change.

Principles to Follow

In addition to general “don’ts,” the research has led to a number of general principles communicators *should* follow on this issue.

The following guidelines add up to a recommendation that communicators *make a practical case based on a positive alternative to the present approach.*

Make practices per se the organizing focus of the discussion.

This is an important rule of thumb for avoiding various problems (such as falling into the Anti-Business trap). Also, and very importantly, this is where the *learning* on the issue needs to happen.

Focus on practical (as opposed to “moral”) arguments for one approach over another.

Some of the arguments can be framed in moral terms – e.g. it’s wrong to mistreat animals, to damage our natural environment, etc. Without an argument rooted in practical alternatives, however, these problems can be dismissed as unfortunate (but necessary) aspects of the Trade-Off.

Focus on the big-picture of American production practices overall.

It is important to maintain this focus – which allows listeners to think in terms of policy change – rather than allowing the conversation to be dominated by Consumer / Little-Picture perspectives.

Focus on solutions, a positive and realistic vision.

This principle is important because listeners can easily feel either resigned or overwhelmed when confronted with the (seemingly unavoidable) problems of the current system.

Make the non-CAFO approach sound like the future – and include references to those who are successfully pioneering these efforts.

Unless listeners believe that smart, practical people are already moving in this direction, it is easy to regard it as a pipe dream (satisfying only to those with marginal perspectives).

(Note that it may be surprisingly easy to make this part of the case: In term-testing, “industrial” approaches like CAFOs were not rated as particularly Up-To-Date. Americans may be ready to entertain the idea that massive, industrial approaches may eventually seem old-fashioned.)

Messengers

Each of the recommendations in the previous two sections also has implications regarding the most (and least) effective *messengers* on this issue.

Anyone associated with a “marginal perspective” faces an important drawback as a spokesperson on the issue – environmental advocates, animal rights advocates, etc.

On the other hand, scientists, farmers and even economists will make better messengers, to the extent that they focus on the big-picture, practical, practice-based messages described above.

The following section details our more specific research recommendations about how to follow the general advice in this section.

Specific Recommendations and Rationale

Creating an “Opening” – Breaking the Trade-off

As noted earlier, the central challenge facing communicators on this issue is navigating the Trade-offs between How Food Would *Ideally* Be Produced and How Food is *Really* Produced. Americans tend to associate aspects of the Ideal System with small, “old-fashioned” farms and aspects of the Real System with large, “modern” farms.

This well-established pattern is a chief obstacle to learning, since the public currently has no expectation that there is an alternative to these trade-offs.

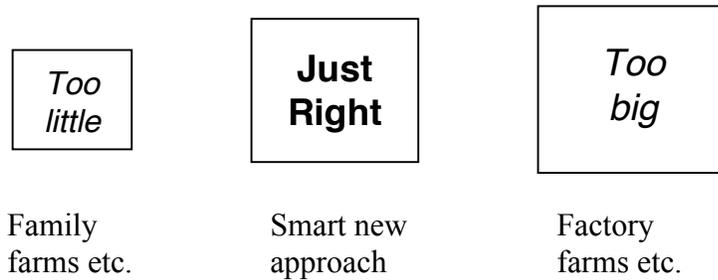
One of the important communications requirements on the issue is a way to quickly create an “opening” in people’s minds – a sense that there is something new to be learned, and a fundamentally different way of looking at the issue.

Unfortunately, discussion of *individual* pros and cons of the different approaches don’t easily create such an opening. Instead, they can quickly trigger the familiar Trade-Off dynamic. For example, leading with a discussion of the environmental consequences of CAFOs can easily trigger a conversation about the need to make environmental sacrifices in order to provide abundant, low-cost food.

The Goldilocks Principle

Starting with the simple idea of farm *size/scale* proves to be a very effective way to fracture the assumptions of the Ideal/Real Tradeoff.

Specifically, the very simple schema of *Too Little – Just Right – Too Big* is easy for people to grasp and apply to the issue, and helps them quickly look at it in a new way.



Since the Ideal System is closely associated with small, family farms (which are perceived as unable to provide abundant food for the country) and the Real System is closely associated with huge, corporate farms (which are perceived as reliable and capable of providing abundant food), invoking a vision of production based on mid-scale farming effectively leads people to question their assumptions about the Trade-Off.

Our research demonstrates that invoking the concept of an ideal middle scale, as opposed to operations that are too small or too large, causes people to listen to the alternative rather than reject it out of hand. The core idea is that mid-sized farms are the ideal: they can produce more than small farms, but don't create the inefficiencies (and other problems) that are inevitable with massive CAFO's. This idea avoids all the traps: it is clearly not anti-meat, nostalgic, etc. Finally, it can be framed as, centrally, an *economic* argument – directly taking on the most challenging argument *for* CAFOs.

While there are a variety of ways to express the concept of mid/ideal-scale farming, our research indicates that one very memorable approach is to use the term "Goldilocks Principle."

When the concept is identified with this simple, familiar term, people are able to organize their thoughts about the benefits and consequences of this new system in a way that is likely to last.

Goldilocks Principle

The most cost efficient meat and dairy farms are the ones that they call Goldilocks operations that are neither too small nor too big. There are some economies of scale and features of an industrial system that make sense in modern food production, but we now understand that the advantages of economies of scale disappear at a certain size. These medium sized Goldilocks farms are the optimum, because they can both take advantage of modern methods and efficiencies while avoiding the waste, pollution, and other problems that plague CAFOs.

I was just looking at this, the Goldilocks farms -- the large farms are the ones that are really causing the E. coli because they have nowhere to get rid of all that waste and that's the reason it's getting in the water.

(North Carolina woman)

Economists are saying that the most cost efficient meat and dairy farms are called the Goldilocks farms. In other words, they're not too big or too small. The dairy and meat farms that are too small can't produce the quantities needed. The large ones that are called CAFOs . . . have problems with storing animal waste and they have to medicate their cows with antibiotics and such. The Goldilocks ones can use the animal waste for fertilizer and they don't have to medicate their animals. And so, this is considered the common sense solution. (Georgia woman)

Offering a Concrete Organizing Image

While the scale message breaks the Trade-Off dynamic and allows people to hear new information on this issue, this message alone is not enough. Without further information, people can't necessarily see (or express) *why* mid-scale farming is preferable to large or small-scale farming.

Further, UCS' recommended reforms are based on more specific needs – i.e. the need to shift away from CAFO practices and toward practices that raise animals in a way more consistent with their natural state. A mid-scale CAFO has many of the same problems as a massive one.

Therefore, effective communications needs an organizing image that ties the vision of the alternative to the particular production practices that make the alternative distinct and preferable.

Smart Pasture Operations

One of the central features of the system advocated by UCS is that animals are raised less artificially and more naturally – including no hormones, fewer antibiotics, a natural diet and conditions conducive to animal health and welfare. In short, raising animals in a way that works with nature rather than against it.

Problematically, the concept of “natural systems” standing alone does not avoid the Trade-off mindset. In the Iowa focus groups, for example, people liked the idea of working

Smart Pasture Operations

Agriculture experts are finding that Smart Pasture Operations (SPOs), which raise animals outside on pastures and require fewer chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and antibiotics, are an improved approach. Smart Pasture Operations take advantage of low-cost food -- natural pastures with grasses that require little water and no fertilizers and pesticides -- and use sophisticated land management practices that maximize productivity without degrading our environment. The smart approach is to work with nature rather than against it, and more and more farmers are finding success with this approach.

with natural systems and connected it to their ethics and religiosity, but they believe it is costly and unrealistic to base the food system on this “old-fashioned, small-farm” approach. Iowa feeds the world because of technology, and this change would reduce production, they believe. Note the following exchange among Iowa focus group participants:

It's the way God created the planet. It's a natural system and it's there for a purpose. God also created man too, and our ability to reason and solve problems. (woman)

Our technology has fed the world now. You'd better keep that in mind. (man)

From Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, parts of Minnesota feed the world. (woman)

If we can use those natural systems and feed the world, prove it. (woman)

In short, the idea of Working With Natural Systems, as a leading idea, ends up falling into something like the Enviro Trap – it seems to ignore practical need in favor of a nice but ultimately marginal perspective.

Fundamentally, the alternative to CAFOs is farming based on pastured animals. Grounding the vision of the preferred system in the practice of pasturing animals provides a distinct and concrete contrast with CAFOs, from which various advantages naturally flow.

One effective way of tying the preferred system to pastures is to use the term “Smart Pasture Operations.” When the concept is described, people readily understand that pastures are central to production, that animals will be less crowded (preventing disease), and that this approach cannot be accomplished by a massive operation in a concentrated fashion. This description sounds modern and more realistic than the typical “small farm” approach.

These CAFO's seem to make a lot of sense but then it turns out it's not a whole lot of sense . . .because it takes down the earth more than it builds it up. Whereas the . . . Smart Pasture Operations. It makes absolute sense. The animal eats the grass, then puts manure down on the grass, and produces more grass and you get an easily understandable cycle of nutrition and production and what have you.

(Illinois man)

Connecting the Dots

The terms “Goldilocks Principle” and “Smart Pasture Operations” are very compatible with each other and begin to paint a picture of a preferred system of agriculture. However, the terms are not silver bullets. How communicators define and flesh-out these concepts significantly influences people’s understanding and motivation to act.

For example, a narrow focus on the environmental consequences of waste lagoons leads many people to conclude that we need tough requirements regarding the *capture* of waste – rather than concluding that concentrations of waste should not occur in the first place. Similarly, a focus on the health of the food coming from CAFOs does create motivation to change the system, but many research participants advocate changes at the margins of the system – eliminating hormones, reducing antibiotic use, more inspections and so on.

Therefore, effective communications needs to support the organizing ideas (the Goldilocks Principle and Smart Pasture Operations) with explanatory points that create inescapable connections between the importance of mid-scale, pasture-based production and the consequences for the environment, animal health, nutrition, and cost.

Explanatory Points

The following *explanatory points* help people understand what is meant by “Goldilocks” and “Smart Pasture Operations.” These points work together to create a compelling and easily understood picture of the benefits/advantages of the non-CAFO approach. Importantly, they add up to *a single, coherent image*.

Less crowding → less disease → fewer antibiotics

Natural, pastured diet → healthier animals → more nutritious meat/dairy

“Free” pastures → more economical

Manageable scale → no waste lagoons to poison the environment

In the context of this coherent, concrete and practical image, the idea of working with natural systems acts as an effective general principle: People can see that working with natural systems is more practical and efficient, because it avoids the hidden and long-term costs of CAFOs while continuing to produce at high levels. All of these points avoid the traps and resolve the Trade-Off between the Ideal and Real Systems.

Each of the explanatory points has an important role to play in creating a compelling and coherent picture.

Less crowding → less disease → fewer antibiotics

Example: SPOs don't have to regularly medicate overcrowded animals with antibiotics

Many research participants already understood something about the dangers of antibiotic overuse but could not direct that knowledge in a helpful direction. Overcrowding leading to the spread of disease is an obvious connection that people readily grasp. Therefore, they can connect the dots between crowding, disease and antibiotics.

The shift [from CAFOs to SPOs] would mean that animals are not kept in overcrowded conditions and it would mean that animals don't need as many antibiotics.
(Virginia man)

Natural, pastured diet → healthier animals → more nutritious meat/dairy

Example: A pastured diet results in meat that is leaner and more nutritious.

While many research participants understood that animals are confined, few could initially explain any downside other than cruelty to animals and (perhaps) spread of disease. Further, few research participants knew anything about what animals eat or why that should be a consideration. When they learn a bit more about how changes in the nutritional value of meat are based on production practices, they readily connect the value of “diet and exercise” to healthy animals and nutritious meat and dairy.

Of course. If I sit around and eat and watch TV all day, I am not going to be healthy, versus if I'm walking around looking for my vegetables in the pasture I'm going to be healthier and, of course, I'm going to be better to eat if someone so desires. So that's obvious. That's extremely obvious.

(Iowa woman)

“Free” pastures → more economical

Example: Smart Pasture Operations can take advantage of low-cost food – natural pastures with grasses that require little water and no fertilizers and pesticides.

Cost is a significant obstacle on this issue; many research participants assume *any* change will be costly. Without some ability to address that concern, it will be extremely difficult to build a groundswell of public support for change. Just reminding the public that grass grows for free underscores that this approach does not necessarily mean more costs. Note the following conversation between two Iowa research participants:

There are probably some cost saving, though, in farming in this fashion where you don't have to have as many chemicals. It doesn't have to be as intensive as far as maybe equipment and chemicals and antibiotics and things like this. That's a cost savings too...the products that are used in mechanized farming are very expensive. (man)

Grass grows for free. (woman)

Manageable scale → no waste lagoons to poison the environment

Example: Thousands of tons of concentrated manure produced by CAFO animals ends up draining into rivers, lakes and ground water, along with the pesticides and fertilizers used to grow the animal feed.

The public does not interpret “cost” solely in narrow financial terms. An effective critique of CAFOs is the hidden and long-term costs. In the focus groups, people readily understood the long-term environmental (and by extension health) costs associated with CAFOs.

I like the idea of the Goldilocks sized farm. In the back of my mind for some reason that seemed to make sense to me that crowding the animals and do it the way it's done a lot times now couldn't be the best way to do it because like it says there is hidden costs. There are environmental costs. I learned facts about health costs.

(North Carolina man)

I read that thing and where it said the large operations have many hidden but costly side effects. I have to think back to the hog farms when they had the flooding in the eastern part of the state and all those waste lagoons got washed into the rivers and streams and killed a lot of the natural fish, the crawfish. And that washed down into the sound and it polluted a lot of the shellfish beds and what have you. That's a cost that we're all paying that wasn't reflected in the cost of raising the animals.

(North Carolina man)

Note, however, that they struggled to understand the relationship between waste lagoons and *subsidies*. Subsidies as *incentives* for the desired alternative to CAFOs are more readily understood than *eliminating* subsidies for waste lagoons.

Values and Tone

Much of the current communications on this issue emphasizes cruelty and revulsion. Our research suggests that those approaches prevent many people from engaging in solutions. They do not want to listen to horrifying critiques of *the only system that exists* because it

would make it impossible to eat, they conclude. Instead of being shocked into paying attention, many stop listening as quickly as possible.

Well, if I listen to it, I don't want to eat meat. Like hamburger and E. coli, just thinking about that. (North Carolina woman)

It's like I don't want to hear what goes in a hot dog. I don't want to know. I love hot dogs. Just don't even go there. (Iowa woman)

Advocate communications also frequently take an argumentative tone. Focus group participants were highly sensitive to communications that use a broad brush to critique everything and everyone in the system.

I guess I disagree with anything that starts with the premise that everything is bad about a particular system. Now I don't know who you're working for. I don't know necessarily what the issues are here, but if I were reading this sentence in a magazine that would throw the biggest red flag to me: "It is time to retire misguided massive industrialization in agriculture that works against natural systems." (Iowa woman)

On the other hand, there are a number of values that proved to be compelling to people, and to help them see the importance of considering and acting on this issue.

The idea of **Responsibility** – i.e. doing things in a smart, responsible way – underscores that it is people's responsibility to take a stand on this issue. Furthermore, describing Smart Pasture Operations as a responsible approach emphasizes that it is a practical, reasonable solution, and that rogue operators are being irresponsible.

Yeah, they should have to bear the cost. Again, I don't want people to think I'm nuts, pro-big business. I am, but when they're responsible. I'm an entrepreneur. (Iowa man)

Stewardship-of-the-Earth-for-Future-Generations was consistently suggested as a reason to support agriculture reform. Fundamentally, this issue is about **Self Preservation**. There are few issues that are seen as central to existence as food.

It has to be important to me, especially for my son and his children and children for generations to come. It has to matter to me. I have to be concerned about it. (North Carolina woman)

It's sickening; it's disgusting. Because I can make a choice. I smoke. That's my choice. I know I'm probably going to get lung cancer, whatever. That's

my choice, but I don't want to do that to my kids... When I go into a store and I don't see a label that says where or what I'm putting into my kid, that makes me mad.
(North Carolina man)

Term Findings

The project included specific attention to the *terms* that should be used for both CAFOs and the alternatives. A number of terms (most of which are currently in use) have been evaluated based on several different sources of data, including focus group responses, TalkBack testing (by telephone), and on-line, survey-format questionnaires (see Research Approach).

As indicated in the previous section, the research ultimately indicated that the term CAFO (when spelled out initially) is as effective as any other, and more effective than most, for referring to the current approach. And the term “Smart Pasture Operation” has a number of significant advantages for referring to the alternative.

In this section, we include notes on these, as well as terms that did not “perform” as well in the research.

CAFO Terms

Should NOT use “Factory Farm”

- Overall, this is a term the industry should love.
- It is “the best of both worlds” – perceived as less environmentally harmful, healthier, slightly more reliable, than CAFO etc. (presumably because of the word Farm)

Should NOT use “Conventional Farming”

- Overall, this is a term the industry should love.
- Often interpreted as old-fashioned farming
- Sometimes understood as CAFOs
- Analytically, suggests that current practices are the norm or standard, and reduces others to quasi-experimental alternatives rather than equivalent options

Should NOT use “Animal Factory”

- Mainly interpreted as a *breeding place*
- Mostly tracks similar to CAFO – but healthier; slightly more successful; slightly more modern

Should NOT use “Meat Factory”

- Strongly connotes a modern *slaughterhouse* rather than agriculture

Should use “CAFO” (spelled out, at first reference)

- Overall, this term seems to have the potential to become a “bad word,” once it is embedded in the right overall communication (that explains the alternative, etc.).
- A “neutral” and official term (the right tone, comfortable for insiders)
- Already has many bad (accurate) associations once the abbreviation is spelled out – (consistently the least healthy, worst for the environment, strongest preference against)
- BUT consistently seen as most successful; most reliable; cheapest food (see discussion of the Trade-Off)
- Note: When CAFO is spelled out as *Confined* ... it has even stronger negatives (less healthy; slightly less reliable; slightly less modern).

Non-CAFO TERMS

Except where noted, the terms easily suggested positive qualities such as healthy and desirable food, reduced environmental impact, etc.

On the other hand, unless complemented with new learning, these associations can end up *reinforcing* the Trade-Off, rather than moving people past it. They evoke the familiar image of Ideal (i.e. “ain’t gonna happen”) farming.

Should NOT use “Free-Range Farm”

- One of the “opposites” from CAFO’s: healthiest and most preferred, BUT least successful and most expensive

- See as relatively Modern, in the sense of being a current trend
- Doesn't seem helpful with the Trade-Off

Should NOT use "Natural Animal Farm"

- Essentially the same pattern as "Free-Range Farm"

Should NOT use "Sustainable Meat Production"

- Not clear to people what it means
- Overall, seems to suggest the worst of both worlds – neither very healthy etc. nor very economical
- For many, it suggests an industrial image, something like CAFOs

CANNOT use "Organic Farms" (except when certified)

- This term was tested partly to provide comparisons with others. Its positives in areas such as Modern and Economically Successful suggest that average Americans can conceive of a viable alternative to the current system – *at least as a niche approach*.
- Very high positives related to health, environment, desirability of food
- Also, very high positive for Modern (recognized as current trend), and more Successful than family farms or small farms (though less than Animal Factories and Smart Farms)
- BUT very expensive

Should NOT use "Modern Smart Farm"

- No particularly strong positives ("splits the difference") between CAFO and Organic, for instance)
- Presumably because it fails to suggest any distinct concrete difference

Should NOT use "Pasture-based farming"

- Successfully suggests a concrete image
- Positive associations with health, low environmental impact
- BUT strongly associated with a return to the past, doesn't help with the Trade-Off
- Note: This term was tested as part of a TalkBack paragraph, and the term itself seemed to impede learning.

Should NOT use “Low Impact Farm”

- Vague: requires people to know/guess what the “impact” of farming is
- Might work as a generic reference to non-CAFO operations, but doesn’t, by itself, aid in learning

Should NOT use “Healthy Farming Practices”

- Does tap into an interest in health
- Doesn’t offer any new understanding of practices

SHOULD use “Smart Pasture Operation”

- Has many of the positive associations with “Ideal” farming – Healthy, good for the environment, etc.
- Does better than many others on the “Trade-Off” issues like Modern, Reliable, Economically Successful
- Presumably, all three words are contributing to the sense of a modern and practical alternative to either traditional small farming or massive CAFO operations.
- Not very memorable in TalkBack testing or focus groups

Conclusions and Continuing Questions

During the course of this limited research investigation, we have been able to garner a significant amount of learning, including:

- the general patterns of thinking that impede understanding and action on this issue,
- the common approaches that do not advance the conversation, and may even impede learning on this issue,
- the general principles to apply in communications that improve public discourse,
- the specific message elements that need to be incorporated into the conversation to build public understanding and support, and

- specific terms that help and hinder the dialogue.

However, there are still some open questions remaining. While the research has advanced our understanding of each of the following areas and led to recommendations to improve communications in each area, we continue to have the following concerns:

- determining the very best term for “Smart Pasture Operations” (which is clear and helpful but not very memorable),
- understanding how best to introduce the idea of government action (because the farm subsidy approach has flaws), and
- deciding how best to deal with the question of food cost. This is one of the most difficult trade-offs in the project: Some approaches are naturally seen as awful in every respect except that they produce affordable food. Others are seen as wonderful but too expensive. Right now we recommend steering the conversation away from consumer perspectives and towards a broader “economic” discussion.

Communicators can make good headway with the “lens” recommended in the report, but may also wish to invest further effort in answering these important questions.

About the Authors

Cultural Logic, founded by anthropologist Axel Aubrun and linguist Joseph Grady, is an applied cognitive and social science research group that helps organizations frame their messages for maximum impact. Working with a network of experts and partner organizations we focus on research relating to public interest issues. Cultural Logic investigates the shared understandings – cognitive and cultural *models* – that underlie opinion and behavior, applying the latest findings from the cognitive and social sciences to generate analyses of how people think and talk about specific cultural domains such as teenagers, global warming or health insurance. Research approaches include cognitive interviews, rapid ethnographic assessments, “TalkBack” testing of language and framing, and cognitive analysis of media and other public discourse. Cultural Logic’s research has been presented at the Aspen Institute’s Wye River Conference Center, the White House Conference on Teenagers, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund’s Pocantico Conference Center, the Benton Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the W. T. Grant Foundation, among other forums.

Axel Aubrun, Ph.D. is a psychological anthropologist and co-founder of Cultural Logic LLC. Axel’s applied research focuses on the transmission of explanatory models, both within and across cultural boundaries, and he has authored articles in publications ranging from the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute to Non-Profit Quarterly. He has a particular interest in developing methods for measuring and promoting the spread of simple explanations that help the general public understand public interest issues. Aubrun is a graduate of Amherst College, Oxford University, and the University of California, San Diego, where he spent a year lecturing in cultural anthropology before founding Cultural Logic.

Andrew J. Brown, Ph.D. is a cultural anthropologist and Research Director at Cultural Logic. Andrew’s research has looked at the interaction between culture, rhetoric and public discourse. His work has included cross-cultural research in the US, Ireland and the former Soviet Union. Brown has taught at Colby College and the University College Cork.

Joseph Grady, Ph.D. is a cognitive linguist and co-founder of Cultural Logic LLC. Joe’s academic research and publications have focused on the ways in which understanding and communication are shaped by universal metaphorical patterns, and his applied work focuses on the role of explanation in promoting civic engagement. Before founding Cultural Logic, Grady taught linguistics at Georgetown University and the University of Maryland, and also spent a number of years as a consultant helping to analyze and develop brand names. He received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley.

Meg Bostrom, President of Public Knowledge LLC, is a veteran communications strategist with a unique perspective resulting from her rich and varied experiences as

communicator, public opinion analyst, advertising agency executive, and political consultant. With degrees in both communications and public opinion research, Bostrom's work is grounded in a cross-disciplinary focus.

She started her career as a political pollster: Senior Analyst at Greenberg Lake, Vice President at Mellman Lazarus Lake. In both of these capacities, Bostrom consulted for a variety of nonprofit groups, political candidates, foundations, national associations, and corporations. Desiring a better understanding of how communications is developed and implemented, Bostrom joined Trahan, Burden and Charles, an advertising and communications agency headquartered in Maryland. As Executive Vice President of Strategic Planning at Trahan, she was responsible for determining communications strategy for a variety of national and international corporations.

With practical communications experience added to her background in research, Bostrom launched her own business in 1998 to bring her personal passion for social issues to bear on specific communications challenges. Bostrom has researched public opinion and analyzed communications strategies on a variety of social issues, including: attitudes toward the environment, global warming, children's issues, education, international education, foreign policy, health care, rural policy, taxes, the economy, government, civic engagement, race/ethnicity, and the working poor, among many others.

Appendix – Focus Group Guides

Focus Group Guide Charlotte

I) Introduction (15 minutes)

- A) Standard intro – audio taping, talk one at a time, not vested, etc.
- B) Let's go around and introduce ourselves: say your name, a bit about yourself, what you like to do for fun.

II) Issue Knowledge (15 minutes)

We have a really interesting topic for tonight. We are going to talk about food and where it comes from.

- A) Let's talk specifically about meat. What kinds of things come to mind when you think about meat? What about poultry? Dairy?
 - 1) Have you heard very much in the media recently about issues facing our food system?
 - 2) What have you heard?
- B) Now let's talk specifically about meat and where it comes from – cows, hogs and poultry.
 - 1) Work backwards from a steak to describe all the steps.
 - 2) What about hogs and poultry – similar story or different?
 - 3) Have you heard very much in the media recently about meat and where it comes from?
 - 4) What have you heard?
 - 5) Do you have any concerns about how we produce meat? What?
 - 6) What should be done?
 - 7) How is today's meat production different than it was 100 years ago?
 - (a) Fifty years ago?
 - (b) When you look forward 100 years, will meat production be different? In what ways?

III) Creating a New Lens on the Issue (70 minutes)

A) Goldilocks Concept

- 1) Another article I was reading recently talked about the future of food production and how size matters in effective, efficient food production. If farms are too small or too big, they are less efficient. How do you react to that idea? Discuss.
- 2) Let me share with you just a few points on that idea. HANDOUT
- 3) What's your reaction?
- 4) What's the main point?
- 5) How does it make you feel?
- 6) What should be done?
- 7) Anything confusing?

Economists are saying that the most cost efficient meat and dairy farms are the ones that they call Goldilocks operations that are neither too small nor too big.

- Very small farms alone simply can't produce quantities that can realistically supply the entire American market, but the very large operations that currently supply most of the market, called CAFOs or Confined Animal Feeding Operations, have so many hidden but costly side effects that their true costs are very high.
- Goldilocks operations have many built in advantages. They don't have to store huge quantities of animal waste, but can use it to enrich the soil instead. They don't have to regularly medicate overcrowded animals with antibiotics and they can pasture feed animals instead of relying exclusively on purchased feed.
- There are some economies of scale and features of an industrial system that make sense in modern food production, but we now understand that the advantages of economies of scale disappear at a certain size.
- These medium sized Goldilocks farms are the optimum, because they can both take advantage of modern methods and efficiencies while avoiding the waste, pollution, and other problems that plague CAFOs.
- The Goldilocks role is increasingly being recognized as the common sense solution to the most basic challenges that face animal farming.

B) Ecosystem Concept

- 1) One of the things I was reading recently talked about different kinds of production methods, and how some farms work with natural systems to raise animals while others actually work against natural systems. How do you react to that idea? Discuss.
- 2) Let me share with you just a few points on that idea. HANDOUT
- 3) What's your reaction?
- 4) What's the main point?
- 5) How does it make you feel?
- 6) What should be done?
- 7) Anything confusing?

Smart Pasture Operations (SPOs) take advantage of what we know about how natural systems work to produce meat and milk efficiently while avoiding a lot of specific problems created by CAFOs.

- A cow that is living on a pasture is at the center of a pretty amazing system. Cows eat grass, produce milk, meat, and manure that fertilizes the pasture and crops. The diversity of animals and plants on a farm work together in an efficient, natural cycle that is self-regulating and balanced. We can either work with those systems, or we can fight them.
- Agriculture experts are finding that Smart Pasture Operations (SPOs), which raise animals outside on pastures and require fewer chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and antibiotics, are an improved approach. Smart Pasture Operations take advantage of low-cost food -- natural pastures with grasses that require little water and no fertilizers and pesticides -- and use sophisticated land management practices that maximize productivity without degrading our environment. The natural grass diet results in meat that is leaner and more nutritious.
- In contrast, most of our meat is currently produced in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations or CAFOs, where thousands of animals are confined in close quarters in artificial facilities. CAFOs rely heavily on feed that cows' (and pigs' and chickens') bodies were not meant to digest, such as corn and grain, as well as drugs and other additives so they grow faster. Thousands of tons of concentrated manure produced by CAFO animals ends up draining into rivers, lakes and ground water, along with the pesticides and fertilizers used to grow the animal feed.
- The smart approach is to work with nature rather than against it, and more and more farmers are finding success with this approach. For example, Joel Salatin runs a 550-acre SPO in Virginia where chickens aren't cramped in houses, pigs have their own pastures, and cows get to feed on fresh grass every day. He practices rotational grazing, where he allows his animals to feed on fresh grass regularly. He sells whole broilers for \$1.50 per pound, pork loin roasts for \$5.50 per pound, and ground beef is \$2.75 per pound. Last year his farm turned a profit of \$100,000, way ahead of other farmers his size.

C) Health Concept

- 1) Another article I was reading recently talked about the relationship between food production and health. How do you react to that idea? Discuss.
- 2) How does the food production system affect our health?
 - (a) How does it affect nutrition? Listen for: Factory farming creates less nutritious meats, poor quality animal nutrition, unhealthy animal environment, etc.
- 3) Let me share with you just a few points on that idea. HANDOUT
- 4) What's your reaction?
- 5) What's the main point?
- 6) How does it make you feel?
- 7) What should be done?

8) Anything confusing?

Our food supply is only as healthy as the animals we raise.

- How animals are raised affects the nutritional value of the meat, milk, and eggs.
- Pasture-based farming and less over-crowding are healthier farming practices because healthier animals require fewer of the drugs and antibiotics that threaten to contaminate our food chain and water supply. This means less chance of creating drug-resistant strains of disease that then affect humans.
- Research comparing the benefits of CAFO raised chickens to pasture-raised chickens found that the pastured chickens have 30% less saturated fat, 50% more vitamin A and 400% more omega-3 fatty acids than CAFO-raised birds.
- Beef from CAFO cattle have up to 500% more saturated fat than beef from pasture-raised cattle, and reduced amounts of healthy omega-3 fatty acids.
- Dangerous strains of *E. coli* began to appear as more cows were fed an unhealthy corn diet in CAFOs starting in the 1980s, creating a new food safety issue.
- Simple common sense indicates that we need to encourage healthy farming practices if we want to improve our own health.

D) Citizenship Concept

- 1) What role do local, state and federal government have in food production?
How does policy influence agriculture? Discuss.
- 2) With everything you've heard tonight, what would you like to see government do?
- 3) Let me share with you just a few points on that idea. HANDOUT
- 4) What's your reaction?
- 5) What's the main point?
- 6) How does it make you feel?
- 7) What should be done?
- 8) Anything confusing?

Local, state and federal governments influence food production through incentives, subsidies, and regulations. Basically, we tend to eat the foods that government policies favor. Right now, government policies advantage packaged foods based on highly processed corn sugars and soy oils, but we could change policies to encourage healthy food.

- Food is even more expensive than you think because grocery store prices don't take into account the tax dollars spent on agriculture or the real long-term costs of how we are choosing to produce food.
- Government policies greatly influence our food. Many processed foods like cookies, granola bars, crackers, chips, sodas, and salad dressings are relatively inexpensive because they are based heavily on derivations of corn (such as high fructose corn syrup) and soy (mostly soybean oil) – crops that are highly subsidized by the federal government while more nutritious foods are not. As a

result, about 70 percent of our agricultural land in the Midwest is devoted to producing these crops.

- While there were good reasons for starting these incentives and subsidies, there are unintended consequences that are causing some to think we need to make changes to the way these work. For example, the overabundance of “cheap” subsidized corn and soybeans led meat producers to use them as feed in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) that create too much waste for the land to absorb, leading to massive sewage lagoons that become a danger to human health and the environment. Our tax dollars often subsidize the cost of containing the sewage and cleaning up air and water pollution, which gives CAFOs another economic advantage over farms that do not use subsidized feeds or create huge amounts of waste.
- Farm subsidies are a powerful tool that we can use in a different way to encourage production practices that protect health and the environment and ensure farm productivity for future generations.

E) Animal Cruelty

- 1) Some of you mentioned animal welfare as we talked about each of these ideas. Let’s talk specifically about animal welfare in food production.
- 2) What have you heard? (If needed: animals crowded together in industrial barns, cut beaks off chickens, cut tails off pigs, food and drugs for fast growth, animals that can’t walk, never see outdoors, etc.)
- 3) Where do you get this information?
- 4) What kind of organizations or people talk about animal welfare?
- 5) Why do they care about that issue? What is their goal?
- 6) What do you think about how animals are treated?
- 7) What should be done about it?
- 8) Point – They are raised for food, going to die anyway. Discuss.
- 9) Point – While they are alive, they should be treated well. Discuss.

F) Compare

- 1) Go back and look at the four concepts; what elements are most compelling?
- 2) How come?
- 3) Are there other reasons to be concerned about these issues that we didn’t bring up tonight? What?

G) Messenger

- 1) What kinds of organizations care about these issues? (Animal rights, environmentalists, etc.)
- 2) How would you react to different kinds of organizations speaking out on this issue?
 - (a) Humane Society of the United States
 - (b) Sierra Club
 - (c) Union of Concerned Scientists
 - (d) Academic or University-based animal scientists

- (e) Farmers
- 3) Looking at the message(s) you found most effective, can all these organizations deliver that message? What kind of organization do you expect to deliver that message? Which would be most compelling?

IV) Debate (15 minutes)

(If time)

We are going to break up into two groups. One group will argue on behalf of a set of policies, while the other will argue against it.

- A) Proponents, then opponents – back and forth as long as the debate is useful.
- B) If time, ask respondents to give the best reason to support each policy.
- We should cut huge government subsidies to companies that operate feedlots and produce grain for animal feed, and direct some of those resources to farmers who want to raise animals in pasture-based systems.
 - We should prohibit the overuse of antibiotics that mask stress and illness in food animals and create antibiotic-resistant bacteria that in turn threaten human medicine.
 - We should strictly regulate the disposal of huge quantities of manure from animal factories, and hold feedlot operators accountable for the environmental and public health damage from manure spills and runoff.
 - We should increase funding for research to better understand the ways natural systems can maximize the production of healthy food for generations to come while enhancing our environment.

V) Wrap Up (5 minutes)

When you look forward 100 years, how will meat production be different?

Honestly, how important is this issue to you really? Why?

What do you think needs to be done?

Of all the things we talked about tonight, what do you most remember? What stands out?

Focus Group Guide Des Moines

I) Introduction (15 minutes)

- A) Standard intro – audio taping, talk one at a time, not vested, etc.
- B) Let's go around and introduce ourselves: say your name, a bit about yourself, what you like to do for fun.

II) Issue Knowledge (15 minutes)

We have a really interesting topic for tonight. We are going to talk about food and where it comes from.

- A) Let's talk specifically about meat. What kinds of things come to mind when you think about meat? What about poultry? Dairy?
 - 1) Have you heard very much in the media recently about issues facing our food system?
 - 2) What have you heard?
- B) Now let's talk specifically about meat and where it comes from – cows, hogs and poultry.
 - 1) Work backwards from a steak to describe all the steps.
 - 2) What about hogs and poultry – similar story or different?
 - 3) Have you heard very much in the media recently about meat and where it comes from?
 - 4) What have you heard?
 - 5) Do you have any concerns about how we produce meat? What?
 - 6) What should be done?
 - 7) How is today's meat production different than it was 100 years ago?
 - (a) Fifty years ago?
 - (b) When you look forward 100 years, will meat production be different? In what ways?

III) Creating a New Lens on the Issue (70 minutes)

A) Ecosystem Concept

- 1) One of the things I was reading recently talked about different kinds of production methods, and how some farms work with natural systems to raise animals while others actually work against natural systems. How do you react to that idea? Discuss.
- 2) Let me share with you just a few points on that idea. HANDOUT
- 3) What's your reaction?
- 4) What's the main point?
- 5) How does it make you feel?
- 6) What should be done?
- 7) Anything confusing?

Farms work with nature; Animal factories work against nature.

- A cow that is living on a pasture is at the center of a pretty amazing system. Cows eat grass, produce milk, meat, and manure that fertilizes the pasture and crops. The diversity of animals and plants on a farm work together in an efficient, natural cycle that is self-regulating and balanced. We can either work with those systems, or we can fight them.
- Animal factories ignore or even work against natural systems. They concentrate on producing tens of thousands of one type of animal rather than use the benefits of diverse animals and plants working together.
- They also use practices that harm natural systems. For example, cows bodies are meant to digest grass, instead animal factories pump them full of food their bodies were not meant to digest, such as corn and grain, as well as hormones and chemical and drug additives so they grow faster.
- This leads to unintended consequences – cows become ill from the corn and need frequent doses of antibiotics, which when overused leads to antibiotic resistant bacteria, undermining the effectiveness of the same or similar antibiotics prescribed to people by doctors.
- Another unintended consequence is that dangerous strains of e-coli began to appear as more cows were corn fed in massive feedlots starting in the 1980s, creating a new food safety issue.
- Similar practices occur with hogs, poultry, dairy and egg production.
- Animal factories produce massive amounts of pollution, leading to significant harm to the environment.
- The smart approach is to work with nature rather than against it, and break up centralized massive animal factories that overwhelm the natural balance into dispersed manageable pastures.

B) Sustainability Concept

- 1) Another article I was reading recently talked about different kinds of production methods, and how some farms work in ways that will produce food for generations by protecting and sustaining the land, while others really focus on short-term economic gain and don't worry about long-term consequences. How do you react to that idea? Discuss.
- 2) Let me share with you just a few points on that idea. HANDOUT
- 3) What's your reaction?
- 4) What's the main point?
- 5) How does it make you feel?
- 6) What should be done?
- 7) Anything confusing?

Some farms work in ways that will produce food for generations because they use practices that sustain the land and allow it to continue to produce. Others use industrial agriculture practices that prioritize short-term economic gain resulting in negative long-term consequences.

- Food is even more expensive than you think because grocery store prices don't take into account the real long-term costs of how we are choosing to produce food. Placing the profit motive above all else results in sickness and disease, environmental damage, and in the production of inferior food that weakens rather than strengthens the body.
- To create production "efficiencies," producers began to use massive feedlots that operate without adequate environmental safeguards. These feedlots create too much waste for the land to absorb, leading to massive sewage lagoons that become a danger to human health and the environment. Our tax dollars pay to clean up their mistakes.
- By allowing huge agriculture corporations to avoid the expenses associated with socially responsible practices, our tax dollars are allowing them the leeway to grow and squeeze independent, socially responsible farmers out of the market. That means more and more land is overworked and abused in ways that undermine our ability to produce food for the long-term.
- It doesn't have to be this way. Citizens can insist that our farm subsidies go only to good production practices that protect health and the environment and sustain food production for future generations.

C) Health Concept

- 1) Another article I was reading recently talked about the relationship between food production and health. How do you react to that idea? Discuss.
- 2) How does the food production system affect our health?
 - (a) How does it affect nutrition? Listen for: Factory farming creates less nutritious meats, poor quality animal nutrition, unhealthy animal environment, etc.
- 3) Let me share with you just a few points on that idea. HANDOUT
- 4) What's your reaction?
- 5) What's the main point?
- 6) How does it make you feel?
- 7) What should be done?
- 8) Anything confusing?

Our food supply is only as healthy as the animals we raise.

- How animals are raised affects the nutritional value of the meat, milk, and eggs.
- Free-range farming and less over-crowding are healthier farming practices because healthier animals require fewer of the drugs and antibiotics that threaten to contaminate our food chain and water supply. This means less chance of creating drug-resistant strains of disease that then affect humans.
- Research comparing the benefits of conventionally raised chickens to pasture-raised chickens found that pastured chickens have 21% less fat, 30% less saturated fat, 50% more vitamin A and 400% more omega-3 fatty acids than factory-raised birds.
- Feedlot-raised cows have up to 500% more saturated fat than pasture-raised cattle, and reduced amounts of healthy omega-3 fatty acids.
- Big corporations raising animals on feedlots also take advantage of huge government subsidies that could better be directed toward farmers producing healthier meats, fruits and vegetables, and other foods.
- Simple common sense indicates that we need to encourage healthy farming practices if we want to improve our own health.

D) Modern Science Concept

- 1) Another article I was reading recently talked about the future of food production and how current massive industrialization is outdated and we have to move beyond it to take advantage of natural systems. This modern, science-based approach to food production. How do you react to that idea? Discuss.
- 2) Let me share with you just a few points on that idea. HANDOUT
- 3) What's your reaction?
- 4) What's the main point?
- 5) How does it make you feel?
- 6) What should be done?
- 7) Anything confusing?
- 8) If they struggle with the concept – suggest medieval or soviet example.

The modern, science-based agriculture that is now emerging is grounded in an understanding of natural systems. It is time to retire misguided massive industrialization in agriculture that works against natural systems.

- Modern, science-based agriculture takes advantage of what we know about how natural systems work to maximize food production, while building the soil and keeping land healthy and productive for the long term.
- For example, it uses information technology to enhance the productivity of pasture grazing by determining the number of animals one pasture can handle, and when to move animals from one pasture to the next to maximize use of the land.
- In addition, science and technology inform modern agriculture by determining the interaction between a diversity of plants and animals that benefits production – the mix of cattle, poultry, hogs and crops that can make the most efficient use of the land and other resources in ways that will continue to produce food for generations.
- There are some economies of scale and features of an industrial system that make sense in modern food production, but we now understand that the advantages of economies of scale disappear at a certain size.

E) Animal Cruelty

- 1) Some of you mentioned animal welfare as we talked about each of these ideas. Let's talk specifically about animal welfare in food production.
- 2) What have you heard? (If needed: animals crowded together in industrial barns, cut beaks off chickens, cut tails off pigs, food and drugs for fast growth, animals that can't walk, never see outdoors, etc.)
- 3) Where do you get this information?
- 4) What kind of organizations or people talk about animal welfare?
- 5) Why do they care about that issue? What is their goal?
- 6) What do you think about how animals are treated?
- 7) What should be done about it?
- 8) Point – They are raised for food, going to die anyway. Discuss.
- 9) Point – While they are alive, they should be treated well. Discuss.

F) Compare

- 1) Go back and look at the four concepts; which is most compelling?
- 2) How come?
- 3) Are there other reasons to be concerned about these issues that we didn't bring up tonight? What?

G) Messenger

- 1) What kinds of organizations care about these issues? (Animal rights, environmentalists, etc.)
- 2) How would you react to different kinds of organizations speaking out on this issue?

- (a) Humane Society of the United States
 - (b) Sierra Club
 - (c) Union of Concerned Scientists
 - (d) Academic or University-based animal scientists
- 3) Looking at the message(s) you found most effective, can all these organizations deliver that message? What kind of organization do you expect to deliver that message? Which would be most compelling?

IV) Debate (15 minutes)

(If time)

We are going to break up into two groups. One group will argue on behalf of a set of policies, while the other will argue against it.

C) Proponents, then opponents – back and forth as long as the debate is useful.

D) If time, ask respondents to give the best reason to support each policy.

- We should cut huge government subsidies to companies that operate feedlots and produce grain for animal feed, and direct some of those resources to farmers who want to raise animals in pasture-based systems.
- We should prohibit the overuse of antibiotics that mask stress and illness in food animals and create antibiotic-resistant bacteria that in turn threaten human medicine.
- We should strictly regulate the disposal of huge quantities of manure from animal factories, and hold feedlot operators accountable for the environmental and public health damage from manure spills and runoff.
- We should increase funding for research to better understand the ways natural systems can maximize the production of healthy food for generations to come while enhancing our environment.

V) Wrap Up (5 minutes)

When you look forward 100 years, how will meat production be different?

Honestly, how important is this issue to you really? Why?

What do you think needs to be done?

Of all the things we talked about tonight, what do you most remember? What stands out?