

Case study

Sustainable agriculture for people and the planet: animal welfare in farming

Problem:

Intensive farming harms rural livelihoods, human health, animal welfare and the environment

Over the centuries, farming systems that were once mutually beneficial to people, animals and the environment have transformed into intensified 'factory' systems that are destroying rural livelihoods and increasing urban migration and poverty.

Approximately 75 per cent of the world's poor live in rural areas; the majority depend on agriculture. But intensive farming systems can almost always supply any animal product cheaper, neglecting to make use of local knowledge and experience that could otherwise contribute to sustainable production.

Intensive farming is also cruel, characterised by close confinement and forced growth rates. The use of extreme genetic selection can increase instances of disease.

The inherent problems of intensive farming, once seen as an efficient means of providing cheap and plentiful protein, have become dangerously clear in recent years:



Inherent dangers. Industrial levels of livestock waste threaten water supplies.

- environmental pollution, including high levels of climate damaging gases
- increasing cases of food borne illness¹
- over-consumption of factory farmed meats, linked to obesity, diabetes, cancers, heart disease and strokes
- overuse of antibiotics contributing to the increased pool of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Solution:

Employ sustainable, humane and economically viable farming methods

The Model Farm Project is a partnership between the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), the Food Animal Initiative (FAI) and producers in China and Brazil². It is establishing an international network of commercially viable sustainable farms, in order to:

- demonstrate to governments, the farming community and the public that humane farming is a practical reality
- develop appropriate solutions to poor welfare and unsustainable farming practices (relevant in terms of science, climate, species and topography)
- train farmers and relevant stakeholders in sustainable farm management and humane farm animal management
- conduct research on humane farm animal management, including environmental, veterinary and food studies.

In China: The project has established a small network of model farms in the Beijing area, rearing traditional or locally adapted breeds in conditions that are as natural as possible. These conditions respect the local environment and ensure the profitability of the product. Their produce has found a premium price in the market, supplying the growing Chinese middle classes with food that is both safe and ethically sound.

In Brazil: The first model farm, opening in 2010, will be a centre of excellence where farmers can learn humane handling and husbandry practices. Government, industry, farmers and the public will be able to observe a humane, commercially viable and environmentally sustainable farm in action.

Impact:

Sustainable, humane farming methods increase incomes and improve animal welfare

Access to information and advice, provided through the Model Farm Project, has enabled individual farmers to deliver safe, good quality food to the local community.

In return, their incomes have become more secure. Increasing numbers of people see the health benefits of organic, higher welfare food, which these farmers can now supply.

Their achievements, including bringing some of the first organic food to Beijing, prove that humane farming works.

By working with existing farmers and producers, the Model Farm Project has made headway in convincing governments, the public and the farming community that it is possible to develop locally relevant, commercial and humane farming solutions.



Humane handling. Methods that prevent injuries and improve welfare also protect commercial value.



Higher welfare, higher value. The naturally reared Lu Hua is a local success.

A sustainable farm that stands out

One small farm in China has brought the Lu Hua chicken back from the brink of extinction. Naturally adapted to the local environment, the breed's flavour and texture are favoured by local consumers.

WSPA and the FAI were able to help farmer Zhao Hong to:

- improve the welfare and productivity of his chickens
- organically improve the fertility and health of his land
- market his product to consumers
- secure a more profitable and sustainable future for his business in a growing market.

The project also facilitates collaboration between local farmers, ensuring maximum benefit for the community.

Conclusion:

Humane farming methods protect rural livelihoods, human health, animal welfare and the environment

The Model Farm Project is demonstrating that sustainable, higher welfare agriculture provides:

- a safe and healthy food supply
- greater job opportunities for rural communities and a decrease in rural to urban migration
- alleviation of the environmental damage caused by industrial systems.

The world cannot afford to ignore the benefits that sustainable, humane farming methods can deliver, most importantly for its poor.

www.modelfarmproject.org

¹ Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production (2008) *Putting Meat on the Table: Industrial Farm Animal Production in America*

² the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) predicts that by 2020 Asia and Latin America will be the world's main producers of meat and animal products