From behind stall doors

Farming the Eastern German countryside in the animal welfare era

Amy Leigh Field

Abstract: Animal husbandry, a major part of the contemporary German economy, is the subject of politically and morally charged discourses about the effects of the industry on the nation's landscape and its role in economic globalization. German politicians and activists often discuss industrialized animal husbandry practices as abusive and polluting. This article analyzes how these debates are imbricated in forms of concern about nonhuman animals that tend to be differentiated geographically by urban-rural boundaries. I argue the privileging of animals as moral entities causes interpersonal friction between those who rely on animals for a living and those who do not, and expresses fundamental tensions about the rural landscape as a space of industrialized agricultural production, as opposed to a space dedicated to the conservation of the natural environment.

Keywords: activism, agriculture, animal welfare, Germany, meat production, nonhuman animals, post-Socialism, rural livelihoods

On 17 January 2015, some 20,000 people weathered the bitter cold in Berlin's Potsdamer Platz to protest the European Union's planned negotiations of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the United States. According to TTIP proponents, the agreement promised to generate economic growth and maintain Europe's global influence. Many protesters at Potsdamer Platz were skeptical of the agreement and identified themselves as part of the German anti-industrialized agricultural lobbying group "Wir haben es satt!" (We've had enough!).¹ The protesters demanded not better housing or national infrastructure but better treatment of farmed animals and a greater share

of organic production in the farm sector—both desires specific to the reform of the agricultural sector. As one protester, Ursula, declared to me at a dinner for the participants that night, "Movements like this one are important and we need more like them," before listing the global problems resulting from intensive agriculture: increasing fossil fuel emissions, animal suffering, exploited laborers, and the loss of species from land clearing. "This will creep up on us little by little until it is too late," she added urgently.²

That same day, a counterprotest organized by farm owners, -workers, and their families took place in front of Berlin's central train station. "Wir machen euch satt!" (We fill you up,

or loosely, We feed you) was the rallying cry of that protest. Organized in direct opposition to the goals of the protest at Potsdamer Platz, the counterprotest aimed to communicate to the public that the profession of farming deserves more respect, because farmers' work is what feeds the German public. Posters held by the protesters demanded: "Reden mit uns statt über uns" (Talk to us instead of about us) and "Mischen sich ein" (Get involved), communicating their sense of separation from those criticizing agricultural practices. A young farming student in her twenties who attended the event explained the way agriculture and farmers are portrayed in the media makes her "feel stupid," while three sons whose family owns an enterprise for fattening pigs told me, "We're all very upset . . . The news makes it look like we are all abusing animals, but the problems with factory farming happen on other farms, not ours." The farmers' protest was also not wrong, per se, in its message that the work of farming is what prevents Germans from being hungry: 2014 statistics from Germany's Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture show 85 percent of German agricultural production remains in Germany to feed the domestic population, with the other 15 percent exported to other countries (BMEL 2014: 2).

A great deal of the agenda to reform the agricultural sector in Germany stems from how the treatment of husbandry animals is perceived. A 2013 report from Germany's Thünen-Institut showed through focus groups and online surveys that structural change in agriculture (*Agrarstrukturwandel*) was frequently associated with structural change in animal husbandry, as opposed to changes in crop production. Researchers reported that participants repeatedly invoked concepts such as "factory farming," "mass production," and "completely overfilled barns" to describe contemporary German agriculture (Zander et al. 2013: v). Likewise, a report commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture in 2015, called "Paths to Acceptable Animal Agriculture," said, "In combination with a changing orientation to human-animal

relationships, [deficits in animal and environmental protection] have led to a decreasing level of societal acceptance of farming" (WBA 2015: i). That many Germans are preoccupied with the lives of animals, however, comes as no surprise. Animal protection organizations appear in nearly every German city or municipality, and the nation was the first in the EU to guarantee animals constitutional protection in 2002 (Nattrass 2004).³ Information about how animals are treated on farms has become circulated in national media, powerfully shaping the awareness, conduct, and purchasing practices of publics as a kind of ethical citizenship (Zimmerman 2015). These sentiments build on a long history in German political culture of the love of nature (Lekan and Zeller 2005), often imbricated in forms of statecraft and the consolidation of national power.

On the other hand, however, farm owners and workers report feeling criminalized by the criticism of industrialized agriculture. They also watch television and read the news, and see that reports on noncompliant farms and animal abuse do circulate. As the owner of a mixed enterprise of dairy cows, fattening bulls, and breeding sows explained to me, he had once welcomed a local news station into his farm to see the operation, and the news crew wanted to conclude the animals—the breeding sows, in this case—did not seem to feel well because they were contained in gestation crates (individualized pens that contain them during heat and pregnancy).⁴ "I asked them to wait [before drawing their conclusions]," he said, "and consider that this was about worker safety too, because the sows in heat can be aggressive." He added that he wished "the demonization of large farms would stop. What we do here is not factory farming. The work has to also make ends meet; it has to produce something." For him, animal confinement was certainly part of the practice of animal husbandry, but it also was a practice with deeply human concerns at its core, including worker safety, ease of animal care and oversight, and income to support the farm owners' and -workers' families.

Rather than taking something like the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture's report as given, this article interrogates how the negative view of animal husbandry is socially produced and experienced in contemporary Germany (WBA 2015). In doing so, the analysis also attends ethnographically to the increasing, competing demands in late capitalism on rural spaces and their multispecies assemblages for production and livelihood (through employment in husbandry or slaughter), as well as for leisure, consumption, and tourism (Marsden et al. 1993). I argue preoccupations about animal husbandry in Germany not only express concern about the risks and outcomes inherent to the globalization of agriculture and its violence toward animal bodies but also convey a cultural chauvinism that looks at rural livelihoods with disdain, missing the forms of familial and economic support that these professions provide, as well as the need that cheap meat fills as food among the less well off in Germany. This is not to say urban populations uniformly reject or question contemporary practices of animal husbandry and meat production, but it is to say urban discourses are shaped by Green politics in Germany, which highlight issues such as animal welfare, environmental sustainability, reducing food waste, and fostering alternatives to animal protein. They also circulate prominently in national news outlets and capture the imaginations of those who live at a distance from the rural livelihoods they often condemn.

This article begins with a reflection on the historical distribution and social cultivation of geographically distinct modes of interacting with nonhuman animals and animal products, which have produced animals as a kind of victim group requiring humanitarian-style legal protections. It then connects these modes to moral geographies within Germany, wherein relationships with food animals in the countryside have come to stand in as a key symbol (Ortner 1973) of what Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery call the "biopolitical debris of capitalism" (2009: 28). It is their ability to show the violence of commodification in their bodies, as well as the

power of images of husbandry animal suffering to travel outside the confines of the farm to politically conscious urban publics, that makes them potent symbols for the deleterious effects of globalized, industrialized agriculture. My focus here is not on the microdynamics of embodied human-animal relationships (Lien 2015) but on the politics and human social experiences that emerge out of their contestation in the countryside.

Industrializing eastern German agriculture

As in much of the world, German agriculture is quite technologized and industrialized. Germany is the third-largest exporter globally of agricultural products and is the leading exporter of cheese, pork, and farm machinery, totaling some 65.4 billion euros in 2015 (BMEL 2016). This is, however, not the only trend shaping rural areas and their sociology; as Keith Hoggart and colleagues (1995) note, the European countryside is also subject to competing demands for access to space for manufacturing, tourism, and commuting, each of which require prioritization from the German state in terms of funding and administration. As eastern Germany has harmonized to its membership in the EU since its reunification with former West Germany, these sorts of demands on its rural space have also intensified. Not only did the region need to harmonize its agricultural and environmental policy to comply with EU law,⁵ but it also had to adjust to the new pressure of global capitalism that its participation in the EU had welcomed.

This is not to say eastern German agriculture was pastoral in nature before German reunification; by contrast, agriculture under East German communism was very intensive and industrialized by the 1970s, marked by both extreme specialization of Fordist mass production systems and high levels of vertical integration (Buechler and Buechler 2002: 61). The government encouraged the separation of plant and animal production, where each were separate

careers, and farms encouraged to be self-sufficient under communist rule had to rely on their own equipment, storage facilities, transportation systems, and maintenance personnel (Kluge 2005). The consolidation into collectives was modeled on agriculture in the United States, and the productivity it could achieve, regardless of whether those economies of scale could be achieved in East Germany. The intensification of eastern German agriculture and its discontents is a process that has its origins in state socialism in the mid-twentieth century, which the most recent waves of intensification in the twenty-first have built on. Between the beginning of the “two Germanys” period and the fall of the Berlin Wall, eastern German agriculture underwent significant structural changes as part of its administration under the communist government of the GDR. German historian Arnd Bauerkämper situates this as an artifact of the fact that the “frontline of the cold war [ran] between the Federal Republic and the GDR,” and as such, the organizational structure of agriculture was to be a point of distinction between the two halves of the former whole Germany (2004: 126).

This had been achieved by collectivizing eastern Germany’s formerly family farms into farm cooperatives. Martin Diewald and colleagues define collectives as groups that pooled land, livestock, and machinery from surrounding farms under the use of the cooperative: “Although members remained legal owners and the cooperatives independently operating units, their self-administration was limited and they were included into the system of centralized planning in the GDR economy” (2006: 373).⁶ This industrialization, however, did not come without negative effects on the environment, on animals, and on human beings. The GDR is a well-known example in environmental history of natural resource mismanagement, with the role of agriculture playing a significant role, alongside the mining and chemical industries, in this state of affairs (Fleischmann 2017; Jones 1993; Nelson 2005). A large pig fattening facility

in a town called Neustadt, for example, was constructed in the mid-1970s. From 1985 to 1989, the farm produced more than 25,000 tons of pork annually, while some three thousand cubic meters of raw animal waste were produced daily (Schönfelder 2006: 2–3). As a local veterinarian and state animal welfare adviser observed, these kinds of farms were “prestige objects,” meant to communicate the industrial prowess of the GDR, but had serious problems in animal health. “The disease burden for the animal was very high,” he explained. “Today, a sow can have 21 piglets, but at that time, were bred to have 31. I asked myself how that could have possibly worked.”

After German reunification, the end of the GDR was followed by the dissolution of state-led farms and the cessation of the collectivization project. Rather than view the transition back to capitalism on the part of East Germany as a “clash between two irreconcilable systems,” as Hans Buechler and Judith-Maria Buechler point out, it is clearer to view the Western cooperative and Eastern collective as both having roots in nineteenth-century legal forms (2002: 104), which were partially resolved in the course of returning the two Germanys to a single legal form. New cooperative farms in reunified Germany after 1990 were advised that their previous collective farms were too large for effective production and so were divided into smaller units, often bringing animal and crop production back together. Managers of these new farms, who, as I was told, often worked for *die Partei* (meaning they had previously been the chairmen of the farms under communism), were able to take positions in new farmers’ associations and advocate for state support of their newly restructured operations.⁷ Today, there remain more than 2,500 *Einzelunternehmen* (family farmers) with an average of 61 hectares each in Thuringia, farming 153,018 hectares in the state, and 595 *juristische Personen* (corporations and registered cooperatives), averaging 872 hectares each and farming 518,628 hectares, which, though there are fewer of the latter,

are a powerful bloc in the agricultural sector in Thuringia. Indeed, many of the stalls holding dairy cows, pigs, and chickens that I viewed in the region had been built before German reunification and had been repurposed and restructured in the years after.

Anthropological work on political and cultural transformations in Central and Eastern Europe have indeed focused on the changing contours of property, capitalism, and law in the wake of privatization, decommunization, and Europeanization. In Germany, this period was termed *die Wende*, during which the reunification and monetary union of the formerly separated Germanys took place. Because of the centrality given to agriculture and farming during the communist period (Buechler and Buechler 1995), food and agriculture became a new theater of struggle, among the many generated by the transformation after 1989. Sociologist Szusza Gille has shown, for example, how the symbolism of materials in post-Socialist Hungary, such as paprika, foie gras, and industrial metals, shifted as Hungary forged a new relationship with the EU after joining in 2004, particularly as harmonization to the EU standards lowered the competitive advantage that the country had previously enjoyed (2016: 128).

Indeed, these changes initiated now 25 years after the Berlin Wall fell are detectable upon simply driving through the eastern German landscape. Land holdings in eastern Germany are still visibly larger than their western counterparts. Bright yellow rapeseed, or the basis for canola oil (*Rapsöl*), is grown on broad tracts of land during the spring, where there are very few trees and even fewer birds. Large, fuel-thirsty tractors and other machinery drive up and down fields in perfectly straight lines. Populations of up to five thousand pigs stand inside biosecure facilities hidden from view, often guarded behind tall fences with barbed wire, their entryways watched by surveillance cameras. It is these conditions to which publics agitating against large-scale agriculture in Germany are responding.

Human-animal interactions and contested agricultural geographies

As the discussion thus far illustrates, the economic geography and history of industrialized meat production has shaped not only how contemporary agricultural practices are understood in Germany but also how forms of collective life across the countryside play out. In this section, I demonstrate how meat production and human-animal interactions are emplaced within the landscape (Evans and Yarwood 1995). As geographer Chris Philo writes, “animals have inevitably been defined, categorized, interpreted, praised, criticized, hated, and loved in a diversity of ways that have commonly had spatial implications” (1998: 66). Although most forms of animal ownership do have a monetary basis, in that the animals are purchased and maintained as the legal property of their owners (Francione 2004), animals kept by urban pet owners are viewed with a much more sentimentalized valence than the animals kept in the countryside in CAFOs, or concentrated animal feeding operations (Imhoff 2010), where the commodity value of the animal is calculated and maximized in every life stage the animal undergoes (Boyd and Watts 1997). Given that animal subjectivity is indeed often essentialized in these discussions beyond what have empirically been shown to be contingent, emergent, and farm-specific sets of relational assemblages between particular animals, human beings, and agricultural technologies (Holloway 2007), my concern here is more with broadly conflicting attitudes toward animals.

Anthropologists have shown in the past several decades that human-animal interactions have different geographies and meanings. In all regions of the world, animals are central for human subsistence activities, including meat, milk, egg, and fiber. At the same time, animals can be understood as nonhuman or other-than-human persons belonging as important members to the human social polity, often stepping in as providing a link in human social networks when

others may not be able due to isolation, otherwise-abledness, or childlessness (Brandes 2009; Shir-Vertesh 2012). Historian Keith Thomas (1983) has shown how this view of animals, sentimentalized as important members of human collectivities in their own right, arose in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Western Europe as a result of both urbanization and the relegation of “nature” and human interactions with food animals to the countryside. It is this development that still informs the contemporary animal welfare movement, itself a primarily urban phenomenon (Te Velde et al. 2002).

In this way, human-animal interactions have become an operative axis in what has become a significant urban-rural divide. As James Serpell (2009) has pointed out, animals occupy a liminal position between human beings and inanimate objects that provides fertile ground for considering what human responsibilities to non-human others should be. Through activism and the circulation of still images and video through the media, revelations of the often grisly realities of the meat industry that had long since become hidden from contemporary life (Munro 2005) have brought the practice of meat consumption out of the naturalized realm of *doxa* (Bourdieu 1977) and back into popular consciousness for contestation. As geographer Sarah Whatmore comments, efforts to contest industrialized agriculture “echo everyday sensibilities and struggles to register connectivities between . . . environmental degradation, animal welfare, and human health and well-being” (2002: 151). In an economic geography of meat production in which rural populations are those living in closest proximity to food animals, concern over the ethics of interactions with food animals can often draw on existing urban-rural divides.

Innocent animals and transgressive farmers: Producing the other

As the protest with which I opened this article shows, German agricultural practices involving animals are moralized in discourses contesting

industrialized agriculture. Germany has, for example, a full political party called the Tierschutzpartei (Animal Protection Party). The party was established in 1993 as a materialization of the political aims of the animal rights movement and has grown to some 1,300 members since then, with state-level chapters in all 16 of Germany’s federal states (*Bundesländer*) (Hebenstreit 2017). At a rally in August 2017, Matthias Ebner, the party’s chair, said the following about industrialized animal raising: “Factory farming means unending suffering—the cages, gestation crates, unanaesthetized dismemberment of animals, making them fit into stalls that are abusive and against their nature, abusive breeding and numerous other atrocities, that humans do to animals in factory farms” (Tierschutzpartei 2017). To borrow anthropologist Paul Hansen’s phrase, farmers, German citizens, and agricultural authorities are “culturing” different understandings of animals, and, in turn, agriculture, that are constructed and experienced as quite incompatible with one another (2014: 52) both in moral and cultural terms.

Images of farmers as the other also circulated at the level of the *Bundesland*. In Thuringia, for example, local elections often engage images of farming in the campaign process. In 2013, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) of Thuringia commissioned a study called “Factory Farming in Thuringia: Situation Analysis and Solution Approaches,” from Bernhard Hörning, a local professor of sustainable development. The study examined the forms of livestock production practiced in the state and concluded that a handful of very large fattening operations contributed to the majority of meat produced in the state: as of 2013, some 44 percent of dairy cows were held in groups of 500 or more, 61 percent of fattening pigs in groups of 2,000 or more, and 95 percent of laying hens in groups of 30,000 or more (2013: 3). Hörning concluded that German animal law could not guarantee that such forms “of animal husbandry are indeed suitable for animal welfare,” suggesting that intensive housing systems lead to “behavioral disturbances” (6–7). By marshal-

ing a series of examples of how animals' bodies and behaviors undergo change and harm in the meat production process, the report placed the blame on the practices that make up the bulk of farmers' livelihoods. It also singled out not simply German farms as the problem, but specifically, post-Socialist Thuringia's.

Hörning's report and its contents were central themes in the Thuringian elections the year following its publication, particularly by the SPD, Left, and Green parties. The Green Party's election program—a 56-page document with more than 2,500 individually itemized lines of text outlining the party's campaign platform, emphasized the Greens' approach to economic development as an alternative to the Christian Democrats, who had been in power since German reunification in 1989 (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2014). Voting day fell on 14 September 2014, and of the 91 parliamentary seats open, the Christian Democrats won 34; the Left, 28; the SPD, 12; and the Greens, 6, with the governing coalition to become a joint coalition between the Left, SPD, and Greens—the very parties that had made agriculture in the state a central campaign issue.

With a more left-leaning governing coalition in power, many farm owners and -workers in the region I spoke with felt the election had been fought and won at their expense. Echoing the sentiments of those I spoke with, one former farmer and breeding adviser, Stefan, suggested he was “ashamed of the new coalition,” not only because it brought back the Left Party, which was understood as the successor party to the SED, the party that had ruled during the Socialist period, but also because the election had been won with themes such as factory farming and sustainability that demonized the livestock sector. Another dairy operator, Bernhard, explained that he'd noticed the lack of acceptance of farming had been worsening: “Farmers want animals to feel well too, but in the east, we're associated with factory farming and animal abuse. We're attacked for this, but try to come up with the best counterarguments we can, with better advertising, and better images for the industry.”

As this illustrates, the urban-rural dichotomy is one that informs how views and practices involving animals are experienced in this era of intensive, globalized agriculture. At the same time, social and broadcast media have brought people from different lifeways back into contact with each other in a kind of historical conjuncture. In such conjunctures, opposing cultural logics, genres of practices, and systems of value, such as working in agriculture, lead to tensions that produce new conflicts, hierarchies, and understandings of social order, particularly in light of the fact that, thanks to circulating media, people can now know a tremendous amount about what happens behind stall doors (Collard and Gillespie 2015: 8).

Changing contours of belonging in the countryside

Imaginations of farmers and farmworkers as other circulate not only in forms of speech but also in social and other media, and in forms of interpersonal interaction in countryside towns, homes, and schools.⁸ I often heard city-goers generalize people living in the countryside as “farmers” (*Bauern*), or deride farmers as “animal abusers” (*Tierquäler*). Likewise, farm owners would often complain of their “acceptance problem,” suggesting urbanites (*Städter*) no longer accepted agricultural practices in their current—meaning *industrialized*—form. Anthropologist Uli Linke (1988) has shown as well in examining discourse among German environmentalists that views of the countryside tend to be overwhelmingly concerned with the effects that industry has on nature, expressing resentment over the effects of mechanized industrial production has on nature outside the city. Likewise, city and landscape planning researchers have shown that conceptions of the landscape in Germany tend to exclude the elements that are “physically part of it, such as the urban and industrial scene,” instead privileging pastoral imaginations of small-scale farming (Bruns et al. 2000: 144). It is understandings such as these

that shape farmers' sense that the intrusion of mechanized farming into the German landscape is rejected by the broader public.

Additionally, farm owners and operators reported to me that bullying and the sense of criminalization has come to be part of their experience of daily life, as well as for their children. German journalist Tanja Busse, herself from a farm family, points this out in a recent text on the tensions over the meat industry in Germany: "Although my heart beats for animal rights, I know how it feels when the children of a large-scale chicken fattener do not trust going to their school anymore, because at night, animal activists have gone in and taken horrible photographs" (2015: 14). What she insinuates here, and what others reported to me, is that children of farmers are bullied in school because they come from farm families, particularly if their family's farm has been in the news because of a scandal or legal violation found on the premises. As one dairy owner and operator, Dorothea, stated bluntly over coffee and cookies: "Why should farmers not be able to use technology to make their lives and work with the animals easier and more efficient? Everyone else in this society is able to." A dairy regulator reported to me that a close contact of his had recently gone into retirement saying he was "glad" his work in dairy farming was over, because that meant the "criminalization was over, too."

So-called citizen initiatives (*Bürgerinitiative*) are another sign to farmers that their operations are no longer welcome in the countryside. These are local social movements, often based in individual towns, in which townspeople will mobilize against a farmer's operation lying on the outskirts of the town, or against the plans to build or renovate an animal raising facility. Such NIMBY movements, as anthropologists have emphasized, are situated within local social histories, moral imaginaries, and understandings of risk and health (Neveu 2002). In the view of local residents who live near these operations, the pastoral character of the countryside changes in the wake of development by local farmers: property values may decrease,

and traffic can increase, particularly with respect to feed, water, and animal and other heavy transport vehicles.

Farmers feel criminalized by the way these citizen initiatives operate—through local public awareness campaigns, petition drives, and letters to the government. As one official, Manfred, who works in assisting farmers with marketing their products directly to consumers instead of through grocers, explained to me: "People discover that village life is not what they thought it would be. They see farmers doing their work, start to call them 'evil farmers' (*böse Bauern*), and then signs go up saying, 'We are against factory farming.'" Sonja, the leader of such a citizen initiative against a planned facility to hold 40,000 fattening chickens, put her opposition to the plans this way: "I find that these hens will not be held in a way that is suitable to their species. No one will be attending to their needs; they'll be measured and fed, but not cared for . . . This stall will only be built so that as many animals can be fit in as possible, regardless of the effects on them." She also noted that she'd invited the farmer planning the facility to one of her public events, but he'd declined to attend or give public comment.

These experiences, however, are not themselves uncontested. While many working in farming decry the perception that industrialized agriculture has lost acceptance among the German public, and the sense that the cultural importance of farming that had been enjoyed under the GDR has been lost as the number of laborers working in the industry falls, others within the profession place the blame on the industry, looking for other avenues to forge connections with what they see as an increasingly skeptical public. Emblematic of Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery's (1999) suggestion that post-Socialist transformation involves multiple and potentially contradictory understandings of new cultural and political meanings, a handful of farm owners and operators, as well as farm regulators, shared with me that they felt the industry itself was also to blame—in part because of the role globalization has played in

shaping prices and production methods, but also because of farmers' lack of control of the way their products are advertised. These were owners and operators who explained that they were working with local farm authorities to improve the animals' experience in their farms, as they wanted to distance themselves from the "black sheep" of the industry, whose facilities were highlighted by the press for poor conditions. As the chief editor of a local agricultural press also put it: "We do also lie quite a lot: the cows on milk packaging for example, it's all deception, and it's easy to find out that cows aren't raised the way they're depicted. People don't want to be swindled."

Others shared that they would of course prefer not to do to animals what major slaughter conglomerates require of them in order to pay them for their meat. "We would rather not castrate piglets," said Anna, a young worker from the pork industry, "but the slaughterhouses refuse to accept them" without this alteration.⁹ Still others understand this as a problem particular to German culture. "It's typically German to be led [astray] by these fringe opinions," said Sonja, a former farmer and now-state animal nutrition researcher. "The east/west divide is a tremendous gap too," she added, "with the east still always shown as the worse region." In a post-Socialist landscape still coming to terms with the hierarchies of German reunification and the participation of eastern Germany in a globalized economic order, local experiences of criticism of industrialized agricultural production nevertheless are couched in east-west terms that highlight how caught in the middle those working in the agricultural sector tend to feel: on the one hand, they have done quite a lot to modernize alongside rising European production standards, but on the other, they still feel embittered over accusations of animal abuse.

Conclusion

This analysis of the production of tensions in the eastern German countryside illustrates the

importance of viewing shifts in the meaning of materials and nonhuman beings—in this case, livestock animals, meat, and meat production infrastructures—in local and historical context. In asking how reports of farmer criminalization are socially produced, it is central to attend to not only the post-Socialist context in which the devaluation and skepticism of eastern German products and markets linger but also how changing conditions of living together in spaces of conflicting land use shape experiences and perceptions of urban and rural others. At the same time, the conditions of globalization in the EU, where Germany acts as one of the largest global exporters of agricultural and animal products, and is a leader in global technical innovation for agricultural machinery, also shape the very materiality of the meat sector. Ironically, both sides of the debate are responding to the seemingly incompatible difficulties of globalization: pro-animal groups desire smaller-scale, more local production, railing against the rapid, "just-in-time" processing of animal bodies (Boyd and Watts 1997), while farmers have had to implement and intensify their systems simply to stay afloat economically but understand well the negative aspects of these systems.

However, discourses in the countryside calling for improved messaging from farms to urban publics and for greater urban understanding of a profession that consumers have long become distanced from, and accusations that dissatisfied consumers simply have turned their attention to animals because of their own lack of poverty (the "luxury problem," or *Luxusproblem*) point to the risk of an ossification of views between those who produce food and those who consume it under these conditions of general alienation from the means of food production that characterize contemporary food systems—aside, of course, from brief views from inside them conveyed through print, broadcast, and social media. As Phillip McMichael notes, "the food regime has ethical potential: regarding how we live on the earth, and how we live together" (2009: 164). This much is clear: the strategic uptake of animals as sentimentalized, suffering

subjects as a vehicle for critique of today's food systems makes a powerful moral declaration that what Raj Patel and Jason Moore (2018) call "cheap lives" are only one instance of the destructive force of our current food regime—the others being the immense toll taken on human bodies, the climate, and the environment.

As the divides and debates over industrialized agriculture grow, even among neighbors within the same small towns, and the relative powerlessness that each side can feel, there is a resignation that some experience. Despite calls to make farming more presentable to the public, there was a sense that the divide was already too broad; the economies of scale required to keep a farm afloat in a competitive global market based on cheap meat would never find acceptance among the broader public. As one government official explained, "For farmers, what is decisive is if they can survive. But surviving only leads to even bigger farms, and the problem is, no one knows how to solve this." Likewise, Sonja, who led the citizen initiative, conceded: "I don't actually think our government has real interest in changing any laws regarding animal protection or factory farming. If it were different, we wouldn't have to sit here and write [petitions]." These perspectives highlight the fundamental tension that this analysis brings out: how are the needs of animals negotiated when those of human beings—whether farmers' needs to make a living and feed their own families, or local residents' desires for good quality of life and healthy food—also hang in the balance.

In the industrial core, we see animals used strongly as the operative axis in what is perceived as an urban-rural divide, obscuring the material interconnectedness that populations in both parts of Germany enjoy, and eclipsing the role that cheap calories, including animal protein, plays in feeding those for whom more expensive sources of calories are a relative luxury. Expressing tacit concern about the conditions produced by industrial capitalism in livestock raising, criticism of the problems inherent to mass producing animal products in contemporary agriculture is also experi-

enced as a cover for cultural disdain among urbanites for rural livelihoods, particularly given that those working in these livelihoods provide for their families, just the same as that achieved through the work and livelihoods of urbanites. Practices of local activism, farm engagement with the public, and regulator efforts to mediate both sides, however, illustrate the productive dimensions of this tension between people on behalf of animals, and the generativity of local efforts to revalue food, local social relations, and positioning with respect to global economic dynamics.

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Amy Field is a cultural anthropologist focusing on Central Europe, animals, and law. She completed her PhD at New York University in 2017 and is an affiliated researcher with the Law, Organization, Science and Technology Research group of the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg. Currently, she is based in

Seattle and works in content acquisition for an academic publisher.

Email: amy.field@nyu.edu.

Notes

1. All translations in this article are my own unless otherwise indicated.
2. All personal and company names are pseudonyms in this article. My analysis engages 20 months of research in eastern Germany, conducted in 2012 and 2014–2015.
3. Switzerland was the first in Europe (but not a member of the EU) to recognize animals in its constitution in 1992, enshrining the “dignity of the creature” as a national goal (Gerritsen 2013). For EU member states, Article 13 of the 2009 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union requires that they “shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals.” The member states must implement this by promulgating their own national legislation so as to ensure the orders contained in those directives are upheld (Horgan and Gavinelli 2006).
4. Gestation crates are narrow, individualized stalls for gilts (pigs under one year of age before their first litter) and sows (pigs over one year of age who have had one or more litters of piglets), often with slatted floors. They are contested because they require the animals to remain confined and unable to turn around, leaving only enough freedom of motion to stand up and lie down. Sows may express frustration-related behaviors such as biting the bars of the crate. Shortly before birth, the sows are moved to a farrowing crate, which also confines the animal so that she does not crush the piglets. Research (see, e.g., Hales et al. 2014) shows that loose housing of the sow and piglets results in higher mortality of piglets, representing an economic loss to the farm. Argumentation such as this is often used in favor of retaining intensive confinement in pork production, though the negative effects on the animals’ physiology and welfare have also been demonstrated (Broom et al. 1995).
5. Ruth Harrison’s text (1964) *Animal Machines* played a pivotal role in the development of animal protection law in Britain and the EU. Environmentalist Rachel Carson, known for her transformative text *Silent Spring*, wrote the foreword to *Animal Machines*: “Animals are being taken off the fields and the old lichen covered barns are being replaced by gawky, industrial type buildings into which animals are put, immobilized through density of stocking and often automatically fed and watered” (2013: 35). The text had significant effects outside the United Kingdom, particularly in then West Germany, after it was translated into the German as *Tiermaschinen*. West Germany responded by promulgating its own *Tierschutzgesetz* (Animal Protection Law) in 1972.
6. It’s important to keep in mind the geographic boundaries that contained this territory subject to agricultural restructuring, as the dividing line between the two portions of Germany began being patrolled in the early 1950s, and the Berlin Wall went up halfway through in 1961. This put a hard boundary around the eastern German states, whose interior had to be reparceled, with little geographical or topographical leeway.
7. I thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.
8. Farm structure tends to be mixed in eastern Germany, but in my experience, most operations are run by ethnic Germans. As I observed, many small-scale and organic farms are shaped as family operations, often led by the head of the family, who not infrequently had been involved in agriculture during the GDR. In larger operations, labor can be provided by family members and by people hired in who have degrees in agriculture, though they may be owned by foreign firms.
9. Uncastrated male piglets are often not accepted by slaughterhouses and meat conglomerates because their hormones, if uncastrated, can cause the meat to have what is called “boar taint,” an odor and taste that many experience as offensive and that makes the meat more difficult to sell. The compounds that cause this have been identified as androstenone and skatole (Panellaria et al. 2016). As of 2021, however, Germany will no longer permit the unanesthetized castration of piglets, which threatens to raise the cost of production for German pork producers (Kress and Verhaagh 2019).

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