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# What symbolises a “good farmer” when it comes to farm animal welfare?

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## ABSTRACT

The literature examining farmers' views of animal welfare is dominated by the study of cognitive and attitudinal factors. This overlooks how cultural processes can inform what farmers do and why they may be resistant to change when it comes to animal welfare. This paper applies the concept of the “good farmer” to explore how farmers' approaches to welfare are also informed by cultural processes and farmer identity. A more-than-representational lens was applied to an interview study of Scottish livestock farmers ( $n = 28$ ). This illuminated a set of shared practices and principles idealised by farmers as indicative of good welfare and symbolic of a “good farmer”: care of the animal's physical body, care of the animal's physical environment, health management, happy-content animals, stock-keeping skills, objective decision-making, and animal productivity. We explore these in light of the existing “good farmer” literature, discuss how such ideals may impact farmers' welfare-related behaviours, and how supply chain demands may contribute to their restructuring.

## 1. Introduction

Farm animal welfare is an ever-evolving, multi-faceted concept (Mellor, 2009; Stamp Dawkins, 2021b; Weary and Robbins, 2019). Traditionally focused on animal suffering and biological functioning (Turner, 2020), there is a growing emphasis on animals' subjective experiences, affective states, natural behaviours and opportunities for positive welfare (e.g. experiencing pleasure, positive affective states, positive social interactions) (Ares, 2018; Boissy and Lee, 2014; Lambert and Carder, 2019; Lawrence et al., 2019). Due to having the closest interactions and relationships with farm animals, Livestock farmers are central to improving farm animal welfare (Cornish et al., 2016; Hems-worth, 2003). Yet, many welfare scientists note the lack of uptake of best practice animal welfare among farmers (Balzani and Hanlon, 2020; Green et al., 2012; Peden et al., 2018) and consider this a barrier to welfare improvement on farm (Glanville et al., 2020; Peden et al., 2018). Evidently, there are gaps between what science prescribes as ideal or ‘best practice’ animal welfare and what farmers practice.

Livestock farming is a workplace characterised by interactions between humans and non-human animals; this relational aspect means the quality of interactions can impact animal (and, indeed human) welfare (Rault et al., 2020a,b; Zulkifli, 2013). However, as animals are the object of a farmer's work, it is critical to recognise that encounters between farmer and livestock are “always mediated through a relationship that

the livestock farmer holds with his work in a given social environment” (Beaujouan et al., 2021, p.11). In other words, human-animal interactions on farm are subject to the farmers' subjective views of their work (e.g. how they construct their role and their identity), and are situated within, and influenced by, the sociocultural norms of their work context (i.e. livestock farming culture) (Beaujouan et al., 2021, p.11).

Yet, the predominant literature on farmers and animal welfare largely overlooks the relational and socio-culturally situated nature of farmers' welfare practices in favour of examining attitudinal factors. A recent review by Balzani and Hanlon (2020) revealed that the extant literature predominantly focuses on examining farmer attitude, perception, values and knowledge of animal welfare, with (quantitative) surveys the most common method of data collection. Consequently, the literature in this area mainly views “stockmanship ...as a discrete cognitive activity rather than a cultural process” (Burton et al., 2012, p.175). This has implications for how welfare science attempts to improve animal welfare on farm; recommendations on how to change farmer behaviour or increase uptake of animal welfare best practice tend to focus on addressing cognitive and attitudinal factors (e.g. demonstrated cost-effectiveness (Peden et al., 2018), improved knowledge and communication exchange (Albernaz-Gonçalves et al., 2021), and incentives (Uehleke et al., 2021)). While attitudinal and cognitive factors are an important driver of human behaviour (Armitage and Christian, 2003) issues such as the attitude-behaviour gap (Hennessy et al., 2016;

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Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006) highlight the limitations of focusing solely on attitudes to understand farmers' behaviour concerning animal welfare. Considering the noted gap between farmers' welfare-related practices and those advised by welfare science (Green et al., 2012; Peden et al., 2018), the relational nature of welfare on farm, and the sociocultural factors mediating farmers' relationship with their work, attending not only to attitudinal factors but also the sociocultural drivers of farmers' approaches to welfare is important.

The good farmer concept explains farmer behaviour as an outcome of cultural processes and farmer identity (Naylor et al., 2018). It highlights, how farmers' practices and work-related behaviours are informed by what is considered indicative of a good farmer in a particular farming context. "The basic premise of the good farmer concept is that farmers gain symbolic capital from demonstrating skilled role performance, which is evident to themselves and other farmers in the visual representations of their practices" (Sutherland and Calo, 2020, p. 532). As animals are an integral part of any livestock farmer's work life and work situation (Beaujouan et al., 2021) it is unsurprising that sociological research finds caring for animals forms part of farmers' identity and has social-symbolic value in livestock farming communities (Naylor et al., 2018; Shortall et al., 2018). Examining what makes a farmer a "good farmer" thus provides a window into the actions, behaviours, principles, ideals and symbols (amongst others) which are meaningful to and have social significance for and to farmers (Burton et al., 2020; Sutherland, 2021) and, therefore, how sociocultural factors may influence their actions and behaviours.

Several studies have revealed that factors relevant to animal welfare can act as good farmer symbols; ways in which farmers can both demonstrate and assess skilled role performance in relation to animal welfare. For example, stock-keeping skills are an important good farmer symbol (Burton, 2004; Butler and Holloway, 2016; Haggerty et al., 2009; Naylor et al., 2018; Shortall et al., 2018), where skilled role performance is demonstrated through a farmers' tacit knowledge of their animals and their ability to assess animal health and welfare 'by eye'. Furthermore, having and maintaining healthy livestock are a means through which farmers can be both seen as good farmers and judge and assess another's stock-keeping ability (Burns, 2021). Minimising animal health issues and stress (Haggerty et al., 2009) and addressing animal disease and biosecurity (Naylor et al., 2018; Shortall et al., 2018) have also been found to inform farmers' good farmer identity. Given the limitations of the extant welfare literature's attitudinal focus, and considering human–animal interactions as a relational practice mediated by a farmers' work context (e.g. social norms, identity, construction of role), the good farmer concept provides a useful lens to explore how sociocultural processes and work-related identity underlie and influence farmers' approaches to animal welfare.

This paper primarily aims to explore and identify what farmers construct as good farmer ideals when it comes to animal welfare and how this influences their practice of caring for animals. By doing so, it provides valuable insights into what symbolises a good farmer specifically in the context of animal welfare. This contributes to the wider animal welfare literature (which is dominated by the study of farmer attitudinal factors) by highlighting the importance of considering the 'good farmer' identity—as a set of shared cultural symbols, practices, principles, and ideals—to better understand why farmers emphasise and view particular practices as ideals for animal welfare. The literature on farmers and animal welfare has, perhaps, not seen a similar move away from a focus on farmers' attitudes to that of the symbols, practices and ideals which inform what farmers do and what constitutes 'good farming' to them, seen in other areas of farmer-focused research (Burton, 2004; Haggerty et al., 2009). In the context of animal welfare, where a focus on attitudes, values and knowledge has not yet brought about the desired uptake of welfare best practice, this is relevant. Research applying the 'Good Farmer' lens has enabled greater understanding of why farmers may be reluctant or slow to change their practices if they feel that such changes may undermine their identity

(Burton, 2004; Naylor et al., 2018; Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012). Given the increased focus on farmer behaviour change in animal welfare, it is timely to consider more closely what constitutes and symbolises 'good farming' when it comes to animal welfare. By developing a more comprehensive understanding of what symbolises a good (welfare) farmer, this paper enhances our understanding of how sociocultural processes and farmer identity may impact how farmers respond to welfare ideals prescribed by welfare science. As described in more detail in the following sections, we draw from interview data previously collected in a study of Scottish livestock farmers' perceptions of 'positive animal welfare' and revisit this through the lens of more-than-representational theory (Sutherland, 2021).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Sample

This paper draws on an interview study exploring livestock farmers' views of 'positive animal welfare' completed between March and September 2018 (see Vigors, 2019; Vigors and Lawrence, 2019). Interviews were completed with 28 livestock farmers in Scotland, UK, which included 13 dairy, 10 beef and sheep, two free range egg, two mixed (pig, poultry, beef and sheep) and one pig farmer (see Appendix A for full demographic detail). The study used a purposive heterogeneous sampling approach, resulting in participants from a diverse range of farming sectors and systems (e.g. zero-grazed or pasture-based dairy systems, organic or non-organic free-range egg producers, indoor or outdoor-wintered beef and sheep producers). Most participants were male (86%) and a smaller number were female (11%). One participant preferred not to have their gender recorded. All interviews, except one completed by phone, were conducted on farm in either the homes, farm offices or farmyards of participants.

### 2.2. Method and data analysis

Interviews utilised the free association narrative interviewing method of Hollway and Jefferson (2008), which combines narrative interviewing with the psychoanalytical principle of free association. The interview guide encouraged participants to recount experiences and tell stories relating to three broad themes: (i) what is a 'good life' for a farm animal; (ii) what positive animal welfare means to them and (iii) their motivations to farm the way they do (see Vigors and Lawrence, 2019 for further detail). Interviews lasted, on average, 55 min, and all (except one, where detailed notes were instead taken) were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcribed data were entered into MaxQDA 2018 (VERBI Software, 2018) and analysed using the constant comparison method, first described by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

During analysis, it became evident that participating farmers were repeatedly seeking ways to *show* the interviewer what good animal welfare meant to them. They recounted incidents of their lived (past) and living (ongoing) animal welfare practices. These experiences were used to show the researcher what they considered good practice and indicative of welfare-related competence (i.e. what, to them, symbolised a good farmer in the context of welfare). As such, even though the term "good farmer" was not used within the interview question set, good farmer ideals emerged within and were embedded in farmers' descriptions and justifications of their welfare-related actions. This emergent data presented a useful setting from which to explore and more closely examine what is a good farmer in the context of welfare and how this relates to farmers' welfare-related practices. In line with previous studies, the good farmer concept was thus applied as an "academic interpretation of farmers' statements" (Sutherland, 2021, p. 16) to identify and organise the symbols and ideals of good farming, specific to animal welfare, emergent in participants' responses.

### 3. Theoretical framework: more-than-representational theory

The good farmer identity is most commonly explored and conceptualised through Bourdieusian concepts of capital (e.g. Burns, 2021; Sutherland and Burton, 2011; Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012). Recently, however, Sutherland (2021) argued that more-than-representational theories may be particularly suited to explorations of good farmer identity, providing a lens through which greater attention can be given to the ideals and symbols unconsciously embedded in farmers' practices and actions.

More-than-representational is an umbrella term for a set of theories (Boyd, 2017) denoting research that “includes but goes beyond representational approaches” (Sutherland, 2021, p.2). It is both attuned to what participants express (their representations) and what they cannot consciously express but show through their *doings* and *performances* (the more-than-representational) (Andrews, 2020; Dirksmeier and Helbrecht, 2008). As a theoretical lens or way of thinking, it can shift the focus from just exploring text in terms of ‘what does this individual mean when they say this?’ to also including ‘what are they trying to show me when they recount this happening?’ It requires capturing both reason and action through exploring what humans say *and* what they do (Andrews, 2020).

In this study, when faced with the challenge of representing their welfare-related actions in words, participating farmers—encouraged to act as ‘story-teller’ by the narrative interviewing method (Squire, 2008a)—relied on descriptive accounts of welfare-related performances to explain what animal welfare meant to them. They described daily routine tasks and comparisons with peers (amongst others) and, in some cases, brought the interviewer onto the farm to show what they had described in interview. Participants used these storytelling ‘performances’ to convey what good animal welfare entails and demonstrate, to the interviewer, that they are a good farmer in the context of animal welfare. Sutherland (2021, p.1) argues that such “rich textual descriptions of embodied performances” are suited to more-than-representational thinking. As such, we use a more-than-representational lens to explore and uncover the good farmer symbols, ideals and skilled role performances farmers conveyed through discussions of their welfare-related practices. Given the relational nature of welfare—where an animal’s welfare is connected to their interactions with, and the practices of, the farmer—a theoretical lens which encourages an attunement to farmers’ more-than-representations (i.e. their doings) takes on particular importance.

In line with Sutherland (2021), we use more-than-representational theory as a lens to revisit our interview data from the perspective of the good farmer concept. Although there is no singular or clear way to do more-than-representational research (Boyd, 2017), Sutherland (2021) drew from Vannini’s (2015) five foci of non-representational research, described as follows.

- (i) Events: happenings which reveal expectations and the possibility of alternative outcomes.
- (ii) Relations: the entanglement of actors, human and non-human, within which meaning is negotiated.
- (iii) Doings: the practices, performances and actions which result in particular effects.
- (iv) Backgrounds: the, almost taken for granted, backdrops against which doings and events unfold.
- (v) Affect: “automatic, relational and unreasoned responses to places and events” (Sutherland, 2021, p. 10).

As Sutherland (2021, p. 10) explains “as a set, the five subjects attend to the experiences and practices of everyday life which are the focus of more-than-representational approaches and are also inherent in the notions of how someone comes to be recognised as a ‘good farmer’”. As such, this paper draws on Vannini’s (2015) five subjects to explore and interpret farmers’ welfare-related performances, drawing attention to

how farmers’ welfare practice is embedded within and shown through their good farmer ideals and, concomitantly, how this “doing” of welfare forms and displays their good farmer identity. Such exploration will support a fuller conceptualisation of the good farmer identity in the context of animal welfare and a better understanding of how these ideals and identity may influence animal welfare practices on-farm.

### 4. Findings: Symbols of a ‘good farmer’ in animal welfare

The following sections present the key symbols of a “good farmer” (specific to animal welfare) which arose in participants’ discussions and descriptions of welfare-related practices. Vannini’s (2015) five foci of non-representational research are applied throughout to illuminate and make sense of these symbols. The existing good farmer literature, where relevant, is also drawn on to demonstrate how findings relate to and build on current knowledge of the good farmer concept and animal welfare.

#### 4.1. Care of animals’ physical body

Care for animals is a known aspect of the good farmer identity (Shortall et al., 2018). Perhaps reflecting farm animals’ physical roles as visual representations of good farming (Burton, 2004), participants’ welfare-related discussions centred heavily on the physical body of their animals: health, nutrition, physical well-being and physical comfort. Statements such as ‘well-fed’, ‘well-bedded’, ‘well-watered’, ‘comfortable’, ‘not under stress’ and ‘healthy’ were consistently drawn on to demonstrate both the “doing” (Vannini, 2015) of welfare and what good welfare looks like:

*“A good life for my animals is that ... they have adequate fodder in front of them, adequate feed in front of them. That they are healthy .... the least amount of stress on them as possible, the least amount of burden. So, things like worms, things like fluke any other sort of potential parasites that are on them that make their life uncomfortable, then that to me in my opinion, I should try and negate that or eradicate that”* (Beef and Sheep 6).

The role “caring for the animals’ physical body” played, as both an action and representation of a good farmer, became clear when “relations” (Vannini, 2015) with peers were considered. Like Burns’s (2021) finding that farmers look to the physical body of animals to assess other farmers, participants described how they assessed their peers against welfare ideals of the animals’ physical body:

*“If I walked into anybody’s shed, if it’s a dairy farm, the first thing you look at is how many cows are lying down. And that’s a good guide. And from a nutritional point of view .... I would probably look at ten cubicles and if I see at least seven or eight chewing the cud I’d know the ration’s working right as well. So, these are also indicators, if I walked into anybody’s farm these are what I would look at”* (Dairy 13).

Farmers’ management systems—whether more-controlled (i.e. indoor-housed) or less-controlled (i.e. outdoor and pasture-based) (Vigors and Lawrence, 2019)—formed the primary “background” (Vannini, 2015) to their welfare-related discussions. Participants with differing management systems often drew on the same symbols of caring for the animals’ physical body to legitimise and justify their specific management system (as illustrated by the below dairy farmers with two different management systems):

*“I may have welfare issues with the grazing system .... My problem is, it is a controlled starvation. To manage the grass correctly, some cows have to get the wrong amount of feed to .... it is the survival of the fittest .... I just struggle to see how every cow is getting the right amount of food every day .... I think the beauty of ours is it’s balanced. Because we give them TMR in the morning, so I know they’ve got that concentrate, so it’s balanced,*

and then we're adding the grass in as an add-on on top of that, so it would be more balanced" (Dairy 13).

"They will get rumen full .... So, basically what we are doing is emptying the rumen and filling the rumen. In a TMR system, never ever empty or fill the rumen, the rumen is just always topped up. We'll actually empty the rumen .... I believe that that system itself makes the cow more happy because she gets a feeling of contentment from a full rumen. And she understands what empty rumen is as well. So, she understands hunger and fullness. Which delivers contentment" (Dairy 10).

Interestingly, consumers (e.g. consumers' expectations and demand) also emerged as an important "background", influencing the perspectives of participants from all sectors. Here, the care of the animals' physical body was again operationalised to justify specific management systems and approaches to farming. Participants with less-controlled management systems (e.g. outdoor-wintered, pasture-based dairy) used consumers' good farming ideals (i.e. a preference for outdoor 'natural' systems) to further support their argument that outdoor environments are better for the animal's physical body and, therefore, better for welfare:

"If you take your farmer who's got his cows indoors and it's all run meticulously to the book ... and you write a big report, and you take my kind of mantra [pasture-based], and you give it to the general public, and you say right, I don't care where you are from, read that, now read that. Now which do you prefer?" (Dairy 5).

However, consumer demand was also found to outweigh ideals of caring for the animals' physical body in some contexts. Free-range egg producers repeatedly noted that non-free-range birds have fewer health issues and lower mortality rates. Thus, they would prefer to produce caged or barn eggs rather than free-range, perceiving the former to be better for welfare as it better demonstrates good farmer ideals of caring for the animals' physical body. Consequently, their choice of a free-range system was routinely justified on the basis that it made economic sense (consumer demand); free-range adheres to consumers' ideals of good farming even if it doesn't quite meet farmers' ideals (i.e. care of animals' physical body):

"A caged hen is a much healthier hen than a hen on a free-range unit. She can't go out and get any disease. She is nicely controlled. She is in a shed where one man can look after 100,000 hens .... And he gets slightly less for his eggs, but he used to get a lot less" (Poultry 2).

Overall, farmers are highly focused on and attuned to the physical body of the animal—their health, nutrition, physical well-being and comfort—influencing their "doing" of welfare and, simultaneously, symbolising a good farmer. The physical body of the animal seems to act as the central point from which good farming ideals, in the context of welfare, are constructed and demonstrated. That they convey a set of 'common-sense practices which indicate farmer competence' (Burton et al., 2020) is evident in how they are malleably used to justify the proposed welfare benefits of different management approaches and assess peers. Yet, given the backdrop of increasing consumer interest in welfare and particular farming systems (e.g. pasture-based), that some farmers draw on external notions of a good farmer to justify how they manage and care for their animals' physical body is notable.

#### 4.2. Animals' physical environment

Providing animals with a good physical environment also emerged as important to participants' ideals of what good welfare (i.e. meeting the perceived physical needs of the animal) entails. A good farmer cares not only about how their animals physically look but also how the environment in which they are kept looks. The indoor environment was the primary space of focus, with ventilation, comfort (thermal and physical), hygiene and cleanliness, and stocking density (i.e. space per animal), emerging as the core symbols and practices of providing a good physical

environment.

However, those with outdoor-based systems (e.g. extensive beef and sheep producers) also drew on this symbol to convey themselves as good farmers, arguing their outdoor systems inherently deliver on good physical environment ideals. For example, the following story was recounted by a beef and sheep producer to demonstrate how his animals outside display and experience better physical comfort than indoor systems:

"I had cattle in the shed on slats and cattle outside .... And when you went to these cattle [outside], they would be lying in the snow and the ice chewing their cuds. Just lying and relaxing, no problem at all ... but the cattle in the shed when you went to them, they would get up and you could see them, they were stiff and sore and just not moving as freely" (Beef and sheep 6).

Ideals of providing a good physical environment and caring for the animals' physical body were highly interrelated. Ventilation was connected with minimising disease (e.g. pneumonia) and self-mutilating behaviours (e.g. tail-biting, feather-pecking), hygiene and cleanliness with health, stocking density with the reduction of negative social interactions, and comfort (e.g. bedding substrate) with physical well-being and animal contentment. Farmers' practical experiences in the "doing" (Vannini, 2015) of livestock farming and their "relations" (ibid.) with their animals led them to construct these as welfare best practice and, therefore, indicative of a good farmer. Stories about significant "events" (ibid.), such as experience of disease (e.g. cryptosporidium in calves) and feather-pecking outbreaks, were also drawn on to demonstrate what can go wrong when such good farmer ideals are not maintained.

That providing animals with a good physical environment is symbolic of a good farmer was made apparent in participants' "relations" with and criticisms of other farmers not displaying such ideals:

"You know classic example is, I was speaking to the vet, and it is the same farms they go to every year with problems with pneumonia, you know they are jaggging calves for pneumonia. And it is ventilation, it's back to the shed, and you just think why don't they just do something? You know, it's not just getting the vet out and jaggging them!" (Poultry 1).

The 'look' of their housing also mattered to participants, as a means through which they could be assessed by others and assess others themselves:

"For me, it's having a shed that you'd be happy if anybody came in and took a photograph over the gate in the wintertime and the same in your fields .... I hate going to somebody's field or farm and seeing a dirty water trough. If you wouldn't drink it yourself, why would you want your animals to drink it? And your gates, your gates should be fit and healthy for their job" (Beef and sheep 3).

Farm design, particularly animal housing, provided the main "background" (ibid.) to good physical environment ideals; for it was in farm design (e.g. the configuration, amenities and ventilation of sheds) that these symbols could be embodied and, therefore, outwardly displayed. Descriptions of how they chose to design housing and handling systems, or what they were doing to upgrade them were drawn on often, appearing to act as a medium through which they could convey that they care about welfare:

"We are spending quite a bit of money this year upgrading the sheds. So, it's getting a new roof, big high roof on it to get in some air and more light into it. And also, while we're at it, we're changing, we're getting a lot more slatted channels in the shed to get the slurry away quicker, trying to keep their feet dryer" (Dairy 3).

Indeed, the design of the animal physical environment was utilised by several participants to highlight their good farmer status in relation to welfare; a display of how they go above and beyond what other farmers' do:

*“The way I’ve designed my sheds .... A lot of people don’t do what I do. It’s a lot more expense. I’ve built all my sheds with baffles on the outside .... and that shelters the pop hole .... And again, these are way beyond what you have to have .... These are investments in how to get the environment right for your hen” (Poultry 2).*

Consideration of participant “affect” (ibid.) further revealed that such a symbol, so embedded within the culture of farming, can become something that farmers measure and judge themselves against. As the following narrative reveals, positive self-assessments against such ideals support job satisfaction, resulting in positive affect:

*“The reason I do it is, I want to have a living. But, the plus side for it for me is .... I’ve got a sense of self-satisfaction and a sense of achievement, and a sense of responsibility ... You’ve fulfilled your obligation to looking after an animal ....so you can go to your bed at night and think well actually, my cows are, it’s in the middle of winter, it’s a terrible night, and they are all under cover and they are all warm, lying in nice clean dry beds, got plenty of water and feeding, and actually thinking, well look at the weather outside and I think, oh aye. So, I’m happy. Cows have got to be happy” (Dairy 5).*

Thus, for participants of this study, providing animals with a good physical environment is not only a core component of their “doing” of welfare but also a symbolic means through which they can actively display good farming to others. Just as displayed tidiness (Burns, 2021) is a well-recognised aspect of the good farmer identity, demonstrating the good physical environment ideals of cleanliness and hygiene, ventilation, space, and comfort are important to the good farmer identity in respect of welfare.

#### 4.3. Health management

Health management practices emerged as an important means through which farmers demonstrated skilled welfare-related role performance. Activities related to reducing, addressing or monitoring health issues were presented as best practice animal welfare. As illustrated below, animal welfare and animal health are inextricably linked in farmers’ notions of welfare—they are two sides of the same coin—and are directly connected to farmer identity:

*“Animal welfare is what farmers do. It shouldn’t be an option. You can’t have a farmer who doesn’t think about animal welfare because their business won’t thrive, it is as simple as that. You have to have healthy animals to make a living. Every farm will have an unhealthy animal .... but it is not something you want” (Beef and Sheep 10).*

However, in extension of the extant good farmer literature (e.g. Burns, 2021) it was not so much having healthy livestock which imbued a farmer with good farmer status when it came to welfare, but how they went about the “doing” (Vannini, 2015) of health management. In this study, being a good farmer meant demonstrating you are proactive (rather than reactive) with animal health: monitoring for disease, reducing/preventing the need for medication, biosecurity, and having ‘closed herd’ and ‘high health’ status. Antibiotic resistance caused by the routine use of antibiotics in food production is a worldwide concern (Tang et al., 2017). Potentially reflecting the emphasis placed on reducing antibiotic usage on UK farms by policy in recent years, where usage has halved since 2014 (UK Government, 2022), several participants presented their reduction/prevention of using antibiotics as a symbol of good farming.

This was notable in the context of “relations” (ibid.), mainly comparisons with peers, where farmers who did not, for example, reduce antibiotic usage or consider biosecurity, were viewed as having poor health management and, therefore, typified as not displaying good farming practice:

*“Whereas so many farmers would think, oh that animal is lame, antibiotics, bang. Straight in there, always for everything. And that overuse of drugs I think is a bad thing” (Beef and sheep 6).*

*“[Cattle producers] never consider biosecurity, they just don’t. My neighbour was down here ... and he had not long since housed his suckler calves .... and he’s saying “Ahh, you know I’ve had a hard day” he says, “I’ve been vaccinating all my calves, they’ve got pneumonia” .... And then he tells me, “Ach well, you know I’ll probably be ready for the weekend, it’ll be in the other shed by then”. And at the same time, he’s dripping with shite, he’s got shit all over his boots and everything and I says to him .... “You change your footwear” I says, “and your boiler suit when you go from one shed to the next”. “Now, what would I do that for”? I said “You boys have no idea. No idea”. I says “If I’ve a shed of hens that wasna well, it would be absolutely quarantined. I wouldn’t expect to get in the rest!” I would expect to be able to nail it down and stop it” (Poultry 2).*

Conversely, as in the below participant’s account of their interaction with an assurance scheme inspector, stories relating to their personal reduction of antibiotic usage were mentioned in an almost deliberate display of good health management:

*“There’s too much antibiotic usage on farms .... [the assurance inspector] wanted me to show him the use of that, but I hadn’t used the full bottle for a year. So, to me, that’s better welfare, the fact that I don’t need the antibiotics” (Beef and sheep 4).*

The term ‘closed herd’ (mainly among beef and sheep and some dairy participants) was frequently used as a self-explanatory, closing statement when discussing participants’ “doing” of welfare: *“We are a closed herd anyway” (Dairy 4)*. Having a ‘closed herd’ is recognised as a source of social capital in the context of biosecurity and the good farmer identity (Shortall et al., 2018) and operated similarly here. Participants used it as evidence of good health management and biosecurity (and therefore good farming). Interestingly, some participants made specific reference to negative “events” (ibid.) (e.g. bought-in livestock introducing disease) which catalysed the move to a ‘closed herd’ and used this as an example of how they have improved welfare. Similarly, the phrase ‘high health’ was drawn on and used as a self-explanatory indicator or symbol of good welfare and a good farmer:

*“[Our farm], because it’s high health status, I think it tends to be more high welfare anyway” (Beef and sheep 4).*

*“I mean antibiotics is the big one, is the big buzz word, which actually doesn’t affect my business that bad because we’re high health. We have high health pigs” (Pig 1).*

More broadly, a consideration of “backgrounds” (ibid.) helps shed light on how proactive health management may have become part of the good farmer identity in the context of welfare. Farmers see they are externally assessed — by policy, retailers, and consumers — on such health and welfare indicators. Consequently, they construct the delivery of such factors as best practice and appear to assimilate them into their good farmer identity. For example, monitoring for BVD (Bovine Viral Diarrhoea) and Johne’s disease was frequently mentioned among cattle producers (beef and dairy).

*“We’re BVD accredited, so that reduces antibiotic usage because we’ve got no issues with BVD, which the knock-on effect of BVD gives you lots and lots of other issues, health-wise, which obviously reduces your antibiotic usage .... Health, feed, you know everything, and yeah blood testing, Johne’s and keeping them, keeping a lid on Johne’s .... we have to test for it, and be proactive, and try and do everything that we can because again, that is another welfare issue.” (Beef and Sheep 2).*

Such emphasis on the monitoring of specific diseases is likely in response to the voluntary BVD eradication programme brought in by the Scottish government in 2010 (Scottish Government, 2019) and an

increasing drive to encourage testing for Johne's disease in Scotland (FAS, 2019).

Several participants also noted a similar influence of retailers. Achieving the health requirements of retail schemes were drawn on to demonstrate the high welfare and health of their animals and, thus, convey their skilled role performance in that regard:

*“One of the things you have to do to be a Sainsbury's producer, you have to meet these welfare requirements. And that is why historically we've been paid a bit more for our milk ... because we are a higher welfare group than, or we are working on stricter requirements, than some other places”* (Dairy 8).

In this participant's discussions, the emphasis they placed on minimising health issues (e.g. mobility, mastitis) in their constructions of good animal welfare was notable; all factors they are assessed on by their retailer.

Consumers also emerged as an important “background” to health management and what participants constructed as indicative of a good farmer. Several participants expressed a belief that consumers were concerned about antibiotic usage and used this to reinforce antibiotic reduction as symbolic of a good farmer. Looking ‘good’ for the public and consumers was important to participants:

*“Especially if we are going to reduce anti-microbial use, we've really got to cut down disease in the first place. That is another big thing the consumer will be worried about”* (Dairy 3)

*“What if we could go to the public and say, we know you have concerns with antibiotic resistance etc. etc .... if we can go to the public and say look, this is what we are doing as an industry, to solve the issues that you have, you know we've got better welfare, we've got less antibiotics, we've got less sick cows”* (Dairy 8).

Being proactive about health management is thus a central aspect of farmers' perceptions of welfare and what the “doing” of welfare requires. However, it is notable how the wider context of farming, including policy, retailers and consumers appear to affect what farmers specifically focus on when it comes to good health management.

#### 4.4. Happy-content animals

All participants, at some point, referred to animals being ‘happy’ and/or ‘content’, with both terms used interchangeably (Vigors and Lawrence, 2019). Happy-content emerged as a term to signify an animal's resource and welfare needs had been met and was sometimes used as a definition or an explanation of what good welfare (i.e. animal's needs met) is:

*“Just providing enough, providing all the things they need, the food and water, the other animals to keep them company and the disease, the treatment of disease whenever possible. Things like clipping feet and trimming feet when they need it, just the things that you need to do to keep them content. I'm getting myself into knots here, it is very difficult when you start thinking about it”* (Beef and Sheep 10)

As the above participant notes, welfare is difficult to explain (‘you get into knots trying to’); it means and requires the “doing” (Vannini, 2015) of all the aforementioned ‘good (welfare) farming’ symbols but, ultimately, these can be distilled into the “doing” of ‘the things that you need to do to keep them content’. Livestock farmers look to the physical behaviour of their animals to assess their welfare needs. Seeing animals display the hallmarks of happy-content — ‘lying down’, ‘chewing their cud’ — confirms they are in a state of good welfare. Thus, the visual of happy-contentment is a means through which farmers can both display welfare-related competence and assess this in other farmers (i.e. symbolising a good farmer).

Exploration of farmers' “relations” (ibid.) revealed happy-content to be an outwardly understood symbol of a good farmer. The following beef

and sheep producer reinforced the welfare relevance of seeing happy-content animals through its affirmation by visitors to his farm:

*“To me, being content and happy is walking into the shed .... they're all lying down chewing their cud, quite content .... and the nutritionist at Harbro and everyone else coming here and walking the shed and they go, ‘that's great’”* (Beef and Sheep 7).

While the following dairy producer used happy-content as a means through which other people could see they are good farmers (i.e. doing a good job), revealing how she constructed happy-content as a common-sense indicator of good welfare and farmer competence:

*“There is nothing better than seeing happy-healthy animals ourselves, and it is also just trying to promote that too to make sure that people do think we're doing a good job”* (Dairy 11).

The ideal of happy-content animals thus plays an important part of farmers' day-to-day “doing” of welfare and their interactions with animals; it is a means through which they can assess the efficacy of their welfare-related inputs, display their competence and assess the competency of others:

*“Welfare ... So, probably my philosophy .... [is] you always like to see animals in good health, you like to see them with plenty of space and plenty of good food. And just naturally, just when you grow up with it, when you're walking down the shed and you see animals chewing the cud that's a good sign they're content .... if I walked into anybody's farm these are what I would look at. Animals .... do have a character as such and you know just by looking at them if they're not in a happy place”* (Dairy 13).

The significance of happy-content animals as symbolic of a good farmer could be ascribed to its visibility; happy-content animals provide a visible outcome of the management inputs and decisions taken by the farmer. As described in the previous sections, farmers emphasise the importance of minimising harms (e.g. health issues, stress) and providing animals with what they require to thrive (e.g. comfortable and clean environment, proactive health management). Participants see happy-content as an indicator that their “doing” of welfare is appropriate and effective. Thus, the happy-content symbol works to reinforce the perceived welfare benefits of some management activities, and concomitantly, drives what farmers believe they need to do to provide their animals with good welfare.

Interestingly, farmers' descriptions of the positive affective state of their animals (i.e. ‘happy-content’) were nearly always accompanied by descriptions of experiencing positive “affect” (ibid.) themselves. This reveals they may experience an “automatic, relational and unreasoned response” (Sutherland 2021, p. 10) to seeing their animals being happy-content:

*“I mean there is nothing more content than going out and seeing a shed full of cattle all lying down chewing their cud and clean”* (Beef and sheep 2).

*“Well, I like summer, because I move my cattle every day .... and all you are listening to is the rip of the grass, that ripping noise, and those cattle just as content as they could possibly be .... it does make me feel good”* (Beef and sheep 6).

Such insight reveals how happy-content animals forms part of the good farmer identity and may represent a positive reciprocity between farmer and animal. Thus, exploring the facets of what makes a good farmer, in the context of welfare, may not only be important for understanding what influences farmers' “doing” of welfare but also what influences their personal well-being.

#### 4.5. Stock-keeping skills

Previous studies have highlighted how stock-keeping skills form part of the good farmer identity (e.g. Butler and Holloway, 2016; Haggerty

et al., 2009; Shortall et al., 2018). Findings here support this, but also expand understanding of the practices, actions, and behaviours indicative of stock-person competence and skilled role performance in respect of welfare.

Handling animals appropriately was frequently associated with stock-keeping competence, where ‘good handling’ meant minimising animal stress on the animal and not treating them ‘cruelly’ (e.g. no physical force). Comparisons to and “relations” (Vannini, 2015) with peers were drawn on to exemplify the differences between animals that are handled appropriately and those that are not:

*“[Cattle] should be quite calm around the people they are used to. They should be happy enough with being handled. My uncle wasn’t well the other week and I had to go and help with some of his suckler cows, and the immediate default position up there is that you go in on the quad bike and you start chasing them around the field. And I’m thinking this is not a, that just makes them worse. It doesn’t help matters any”* (Dairy 1).

The predominant symbol of good handling, however, was the design of handling systems (e.g. crushes), with handling systems forming a key “background” (ibid.) to farmers’ narratives. Participants described them at length and, in some cases, brought the interviewer to see them. Handling systems, *per se* —perhaps because they physically embodied stress reduction— appeared to operate as a symbol of good (welfare) farming:

*“Well, we invested quite a bit of money in good handling systems and we use a squeeze crate for the cattle, but we try to minimise putting them in individual sections and we will certainly try to minimise locking their heads .... So, we’re trying to make sure that we don’t stress them as much as possible”* (Beef and sheep 3).

Beyond the tangible nature of handling animals, the soft, intangible skills indicative of a good farmer or a good stockperson were also evident in participants’ accounts, where stockperson skill was considered a determinant of animal welfare:

*“So, one of the things you need for good cow comfort and positive welfare is highly skilful stockmen, ones who can pay attention to the cow”* (Dairy 10).

Several elements made up and symbolised a skilled stockperson: being able to assess and interpret animals’ needs and/or behaviours ‘by eye’; knowledge of individual animals, and instinctive animal husbandry skills. These factors were highly interconnected, where being able to spot issues ‘by eye’ required having knowledge of individual animals and being able to understand (or read) animal behaviours.

*“In fact 95% of our cows I would be able to tell you who they are by looking at them .... And you know some cows because they’re normally in first, but they come in last or near the end and you have to question why? Is she in season maybe or is she unwell”* (Dairy 10).

Participants frequently ascribed stock-person skill to the possession of an instinctive ability to interact with animals effectively, and understand their needs readily and easily:

*“I think it’s down to experience and my own kind of, just experience of how animals behave, and I’m an animal lover. And it is just how they behave .... you just have a sense, you can’t write it down anywhere”* (Dairy 5).

That such skills are highly valued and considered a mark of farmer competence was revealed through farmers’ “relations” with other stockpeople, particularly employees; individuals who possessed them were generally described more positively than those who did not:

*“Being a good stockman; .... being able to pick up on the fact that ... an animal is ill. Pick up on that ... We’ve got a guy that works on the unit up here. And he is a very quiet guy. Very very quiet and he just, the animals almost ignore him, because it’s only himself and they just almost ignore*

*him ... and I’ve seen other people where they’re real loud and really loud and they’ve gone into the room with the animals and they’re like ‘oh shit’ .... He’s just very very loud and they feed off that. They get excited because he is excited. They feed off it”* (Pig 1).

Indeed, to not have such qualities was considered potentially negative for welfare by some:

*“I think it’s a particular person. You are a particular person to have animals. And it’s probably a bad thing if you’re not that person and you do have them.”* (Mixed 2).

Previous research has explored how new technologies and the increasing ‘commercialisation’ or ‘intensification’ of farming have led to new definitions and re-negotiations of what it means to be a good farmer (Butler and Holloway, 2016; Shortall et al., 2019). This was also evident in this study. Several participants described how changes in farming (e.g. greater animal numbers and staffing challenges) have altered what it means to be a good stockperson. Technology emerged as something some participants believed could replace or compensate for a lack of stockperson skills (due to staffing challenges) and for the difficulty of knowing individual animals (due to increasing animal numbers):

*“Agriculture is changing, because there’s fewer people growing up on a farm, so they’re not animal orientated whatsoever. So basically, you have to start at the technical end and take them back to the animal. That’s the way I look at it. So, if you show them a computer screen, look at this cow’s intakes; last week they were eating this much, this week they’re down here. So, then you say right, let’s go find this cow and look at her. And then all of a sudden you might say oh look, this cow’s lame. So that’s what’s made it happen. So, to me, that’s sort of the way we’re probably training more on technology now .... and then that’s the way I would hope then that person then would begin to learn. It’s just, it’s a bit back-to-front learning”* (Dairy 13).

As will be explored further in the next section, utilising objective measures (e.g. technology-produced data) to make welfare-related decisions is becoming both a skill indicative of good stockperson-ship and an important symbol of good farming.

#### 4.6. Objective decision-making

References to animal-based data were frequent in farmers’ welfare-related discussions. That the increasing use of ‘objective’ animal data has produced new ideals of good farming is recognised in the good farmer literature. Butler and Holloway (2016) found that the introduction and use of automatic milking systems have resulted in new definitions of the ‘good dairy farmer’, as farmers no longer rely solely on, what the authors refer to, as “tacit stockmanship skills” but can draw on objective animal data to inform animal health and welfare decisions. Similarly, Shortall et al. (2019) found that using objective animal data to make biosecurity decisions symbolised good farming amongst “commercial” dairy farmers, while stock-keeping skills and judging animal health ‘by eye’ were more important to the more traditional “self-sufficient stock-keeper”. However, in the context of welfare, this study finds that the ideal of decision-making based on ‘objective data’ is not restricted to participants with robotic milking systems or ‘commercial’ farmers. Rather, in describing their welfare-related management practices, participants routinely referenced data that informed their decision-making e.g. blood testing, faecal egg counting, body condition scoring, lameness scoring, mobility tracking, growth weight, milk sampling, fertility and heat detection (to name but a few).

Making welfare-related management decisions based on objective data — ‘hard facts’ — as opposed to relying on ‘eye’ and stockperson skill was constructed as better practice by a majority of participants:

*“If you don’t measure it you can’t manage it, and if you don’t manage it, you can’t measure it .... So, I’ll give you the classic case. Yesterday the two guys who work on the stock .... said to me, God, I’ve got a lot of bull*



calves. And I went away and did the numbers and there were more heifer cows than bulls .... So that goes back to animal welfare. You could make a decision which is on an assumption because it's fresh in your mind .... you could be saying, Jesus, we've got a lot of pneumonia, because you've had to jag seven calves with pneumonia .... [and] you as the manager go, Jesus Christ, I don't want to lose them, phone the vet up and say, give them all an antibiotic, but that's not good for the welfare, and it's done on an assumption" (Beef and sheep 7).

There was a general view that decisions informed by 'objective' data were superior to those made without, and result in better welfare. As illustrated below, this interlinked with ideals relating to health management, where farmers who made health decisions not informed by data were constructed as undesirable and outmoded:

"We try not to treat them just for the sake of treating them, we want to have a reason for it. We like to know what they're doing so we faecal egg count through the summer and then at housing, so we're treating them for a reason .... I just think that farmers need to understand that there's reasons to treat and there's probably very good reasons in some cases not to treat. You don't just give it because it's what you always did" (Beef and sheep 3).

While 'traditional' stockmanship abilities remain important, there was a noticeable emphasis on the increasing commercialisation of farming and, consequently, the professionalisation of farmers. Making decisions based on data, and utilising technology, enables farmers to demonstrate their 'professionalism'. Some participants highlighted retailers as an important "background" (Vannini, 2015) here, describing how their emphasis on animal-based health and welfare data, and farm KPIs, has determined what it means to be a 'professional' farmer:

"I think it is driven by retailers .... And the type of farming system that we are developing, it could be argued that we are needing much more professional farmers. There is no room for the farmer that keeps the information in his head, about an animal. They are making it much more corporate, and so there is a question around philosophy, and they're driving corporate culture into farming which is probably a much more care-based culture" (Dairy 10).

Thus, retailers and the wider supply chain may be changing what it means to be a good farmer, with a focus on demonstrable animal welfare driving the ideal that best practice is making decisions based on tangible 'hard data' rather than farmers' less tangible, often implicit, skills and knowledge. There is a growing recognition in the agri-food literature that the values (i.e. the actions endowed with importance) of different actors within the agri-food supply chain do not exist in isolation, but can move or diffuse between actors to become shared values (Gutiérrez and Macken-Walsh, 2022). Often, a shared context can lead to different actors having shared values. As such, the shared context of animal welfare, coupled with the position of relative power retailers may possess within the value chain, may explain farmers' shift to valuing 'hard data' in response to the high value ascribed to it by retailers.

Overall, it was evident that most participants use, and rely on, animal-based data to assess their animals' overall welfare state and to determine the efficacy of their management inputs. Several participants readily presented the interviewer with 'facts and figures', constructing them as a concrete, or 'best way', to demonstrate animal welfare to the interviewer. Excel files, farm recording databases and yearly health records were presented during interview. Such performative acts indicate that objective, data-informed, decision-making may act as good farmer symbols. The increasing use of objective animal-based data to both inform and demonstrate welfare has arguably contributed to it becoming an important mechanism for farmers to convey themselves as 'good farmers' and assess 'good farming' in others.

#### 4.7. Animal productivity

Productivism is a long-standing and common good farming symbol (Burton, 2004). As sites of production, farm animals provide the means through which farmers' can display their productivity and support their 'good farmer' identity (Haggerty et al., 2009). Here, productivity in the context of welfare was found to not only be symbolic of what it means to be a good farmer but also the foremost indicator of good animal welfare. For livestock farmers, animal productivity (e.g. milk yield/quality, weight gain, fertility rates) is the ultimate outward display of a good (welfare) farmer; only healthy and well-cared-for animals can be productive animals:

"Profitability and output from animals is very directly linked to their health and welfare" (Poultry 2).

When participants mentioned the productivity of their animals, it was not done to construct themselves as good farmers on performance or yield alone. Rather, for farmers, animal productivity is a self-evident correlate of welfare i.e. a productive animal is evidence of good animal welfare and, concomitantly, of a good farmer when it comes to welfare:

"The cattle wouldn't perform if I didn't look after them properly" (Beef and sheep 4).

"Animal welfare comes down to, if you don't treat the animals right, you'll not be making money anyway. If you do the job right, you'll make money" (Dairy 4).

Animal productivity emerged in this study as the overarching and unifying symbol of a good welfare farmer. As mentioned in the above narrative, animal productivity is the outcome of animals being 'looked after properly', and 'looking after them properly' is a combination of all the previously described symbols of good welfare farming (e.g. physical environment, health management etc.). The following narrative illustrates this interconnection between these welfare ideals, productivity and the individual's identity as a good farmer:

"My animals. A good life is that they're not stressed, that they're healthy, those are the two principles, and there is lots of things that contribute towards that. But .... it's the health because, from a non-altruistic point of view, I need one cow in calf every 365 days. And I need to be hitting all the ewes in lamb. So, unless they're stress-free and healthy, you're going to struggle to hit those sorts of targets .... but genuinely, there is no point in keeping them unless you keep them properly" (Beef and sheep 1).

If animal productivity was the ultimate outward display of good welfare and being a 'good farmer', then a lack of profitability (indicative of poor animal performance) is the ultimate indicator of poorer animal welfare (and being not a good farmer). Exploration of participants' "relations" (Vannini, 2015) with peers revealed the symbolic value of productivity in the context of welfare, with poor welfare linked to the poor financial performance of other farmers:

"If your welfare isn't good, you're not going to make money. So, anybody who's trying to make money in farming or anybody who's going to be here for the long-term, if your welfare is not good, you can argue [they won't survive]" (Beef and sheep 4).

"All the welfare standards .... if you can't pass that ... [you] shouldn't have been farming anyway. They were bad farmers; they weren't making money anyway. But they weren't making money. But that all comes back to, you've got to make money to survive. And the bad farmer wasn't making money" (Dairy 2).

Furthermore, participants' "relations" with the public highlighted the social symbolic value of animal productivity to farmers. In reference to public criticisms of farming, animal productivity was often a chosen rejoinder:

*“You don’t make money out of being cruel to animals! You know, the vegans are totally attacking everything at the moment, but to make money from an animal it has to be healthy and it has to be, you know it is in your best interests to look after that and giving it the best possible welfare, because otherwise it is not going to perform for you and you are not going to make money. Because at the end of the day farming is about making money, you know it is about, you can say all these other things like it’s a way of life and all that but at the end of the day it is a business and it has to make money. And the animals are the core to that business, generally, if you are livestock farming. So, you have to look after them the best you can to get the best performance, which translates into money at the end of the day” (Poultry 1).*

For livestock farmers, it is common sense that good welfare and good productivity go together. Thus, animal productivity was repeatedly drawn on to convey and reinforce their point that ‘animal welfare is what farmers do’ as, without it, they wouldn’t survive.

Productivity thus emerged as central to farmers’ conceptualisation of animal welfare and was the symbol most drawn on to justify specific management decisions. The “background” (ibid.) issue of whether it is better welfare for animals to be closely managed and kept indoors, or more loosely managed and kept outdoors was a point of contention amongst participants. Here, productivity —as the primary symbol of good welfare and good farming— was often used to justify such farming systems and confirm their welfare benefits:

*“We’ve got heifers outside, ones that are in-calf .... And actually, it’s quite nice to see them out in the field. But don’t get me wrong, we know full well from the experience that we’ve had that we would have much more control over the cows. We have had more problems with those heifers out grazing, we’ve had sore feet and foul, because the land is very hard and the bits they are on are quite stony. And we wouldn’t have had those problems had we kept them inside. Also, we’ve noticed the last few years that we’ve had heifers a year old, we’ve put them outside and you think oh they’re doing well. But you see the ones that we’ve kept in, when you look at the ones that were inside to the ones outside, the younger ones are bigger than the older ones” (Dairy 8).*

In sum, animal productivity emerged as one of the most important good farmer symbols in the context of welfare. It operates as a commonly understood and practical means through which farmers both assess the welfare of their animals and assess the health and welfare of their peers’ animals. Participants used it as an almost catch-all term for good animal welfare and it is strongly embedded in farmers’ ideals and identities of what indicates ‘good’ when it comes to welfare.

## 5. Discussion

By exploring what makes a good farmer when it comes to animal welfare, this paper has revealed important insights into the sociocultural basis for farmers’ ideals of good welfare and how these ideals inform welfare-related practices on-farm. Care of the animals’ physical body, providing animals with a good physical environment and having ‘happy-content’ animals emerged as important visual representations of good animal welfare, while stock-keeping skills, making objective decisions and demonstrating animal productivity emerged as key indicators of skilled, welfare-related, role performance. Such ideals arguably form a set of socially significant practices which are meaningful to farmers and indicate competency when it comes to animal welfare — they are indices of being a good farmer (Burton et al., 2020). While much of the extant good farmer literature draws on Bourdieusian theories, this study has made an important contribution to the development of the good farmer concept through its application of more-than-representational theory. Namely, it shifts the focus from concepts of ‘capital’ to the ‘embodied actions and doings of life’ (Thrift, 2008). Given the practical and relational nature of animal welfare, such a focus on ‘doing’ and ‘actions’ is particularly relevant. Thus, the use of

more-than-representation-theory revealed not only what farmers highlight as important for, or symbolic of, animal welfare, but also how their welfare-related actions are mediated by their identity as ‘good farmers’, along with the sociocultural ideals informing what constitutes a good farmer.

Such findings have important implications for policy and behaviour change in this area. Extant efforts to encourage uptake of best practice tend to focus on changing farmers’ attitudes (Carroll & Groarke, 2019) often through knowledge transfer (Albernaz-Gonçalves et al., 2021), and their success has been questioned (Carroll & Groarke, 2019). As Burton (2004, p. 196) explains “farmers may also resist change on the basis of an anticipated loss of identity”. This suggests that if we want to encourage uptake of best practice, we arguably first need to recognise and take account of how farmers’ welfare-related practices are informed by sociocultural processes and good farmer identity (Burns, 2021; Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012). Within welfare science, a growing interest in animal sentience (e.g. Mellor, 2019), quality of life (McMillan, 2000; Yeates, 2016) and positive welfare (Lawrence et al., 2018, 2019; Rault et al., 2020a,b) is shifting the focus of welfare from just that of the animal’s physical body to a wider picture that also includes the animal’s mental state. Yet, as seen in this study and others (e.g. Haggerty et al., 2009) farmers largely associate welfare with the animal’s physical body and connect its care to their identity as good farmers. For such shifts in welfare to be successful, there is a need to first consider how they may challenge farmers’ good farmer ideals and consequently, their willingness to adopt such views of welfare. While the extant literature, predominated by a focus on farmers’ attitudinal factors overlooks such factors, knowledge of farmers’ good farmer identity helps address this issue.

Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012) argue that the good farmer concept is not static, but that good farmer ideals can and do evolve, especially when no longer ‘fit-for-purpose’ or profitable. Farm animal welfare is increasingly influenced by market demands, the market-based privatisation of animal welfare standards (Vogeler, 2019) and the development of niche ‘higher welfare’ products aligned with consumer expectations of good animal welfare (e.g. pasture-based, free-range) (Stampa et al., 2020). Considering this, a notable finding of this study is how farmers’ good farmer ideals appear to evolve and shift in response to supply chain demands, with market expectations for welfare being assimilated into the good farmer identity by some. Several participants drew on consumer expectations of good welfare (e.g. pastoral farming) to highlight how their management systems were indicative of good farming. Similarly, the influence of retailers was evident in how welfare indicators (e.g. mobility, stocking density, hygiene) and the ‘objective’ animal data preferred by retailers were idealised by participants as best practice welfare. Participants felt that supply-chain demands for more ‘professional’ or ‘commercial’ farmers were behind a move away from emphasising relational ideals of welfare (e.g. assessing animals ‘by eye’), to idealising representational ones (e.g. objective decision-making). This appeared to result in a tension, or inner conflict, for some participants, as they sought to balance the value they personally attached to the relational with the external value of the representational. Shortall et al. (2018, p.585), drawing on Bourdieu, describe how such experiences of a ‘divided self’ can occur when “the rules of the game the person has internalised do not match the new external rules of the game they experience”.

Evidently, supply chain demands are ‘changing the rules of the game’ and farmers’ are having to evolve their internal good farmer identities to adapt and survive. Just as Butler and Holloway (2016) found that technology is restructuring what it means to be a good (dairy) farmer, so too might supply chain demands be restructuring good farmer ideals when it comes to animal welfare. Indeed, the wider societal context of animal welfare is becoming increasingly complex. Societal demands for higher welfare and wider policy issues such as climate change (Shields and Orme-Evans, 2015), the sustainability of agri-food systems (Buller et al., 2018), and the UK’s Agricultural Transition Plan (Defra, 2020)

(aimed at moving farming away from productivism to environmentalism) are all influencing the expectations placed on farmers. The extent to which these factors may influence how farmers develop good farming symbols is not yet clear. Nonetheless, the findings of this study reflect others which highlight how external and global factors (e.g. supply chain demands, transnational networks) can lead to a refashioning of local factors (e.g. at the farm level) (Jones et al., 2019), and how the values of powerful actors within the value chain can influence the values of others (Gutiérrez and Macken-Walsh, 2022). Further exploration into how supply chain demands may continue to influence farmers’ good farmer identity would be beneficial. In particular, exploring the values and ideals farmers adapt, adopt or resist could provide important insights into how they navigate the increasingly complex environment surrounding animal welfare.

This study has several limitations. Namely, participants were based solely in Scotland, and therefore, their perspectives could not be considered reflective of other regions of the UK, particularly as responsibility for agriculture policy in Scotland is devolved to the Scottish government. Furthermore, the positionality of the researcher may have influenced how farmers presented good farmer symbols. As Kuehne (2016) explains, during interview, farmers decide who is a group insider or group outsider and this influences the extent to which they believe the interviewer possesses a shared cultural understanding. Although the interviewer of this study (first author) came from a farming background and was able to use the language of an ‘insider’ (Kuehne, 2016), her status as a ‘researcher’ could mean she was viewed as an ‘outsider’ by participants. To some extent, this may have been helpful; in the participants’ desire to demonstrate their care for animal welfare, they drew heavily on good farming symbols which enabled them to be explored in depth as part of this research. However, it is also possible that if farmers were being interviewed by an ‘insider’ they may have presented a different set of symbols. As such, further research in this area is essential, not only to explore good farming symbols in different geographic regions but also how the positionality of the researcher may influence the good farming symbols which are revealed.

**Appendices.**

*Appendix A. Demographics of interview participants*

Sector	Gender	Age	Farm Size (Ha)	Number of Animals	System
<b>Dairy</b>					
1	Male	30–40	130	100–200	Pasture
2	Male	50–60	137	200–300	Pasture
3	Male	18–30	62	100–200	Pasture
4	Male	30–40	343	700–800	Zero-grazed
5	Male	50–60	283	100–200	Pasture
6	Male	30–40	160	300–400	Pasture and robotic milking
7	Male	40–50	344	300–400	Pasture and zero-grazed, non-robotic and robotic milking
8	Male	30–40	100	100–200	Zero-grazed
9	Female	18–30	307	300–400	Zero-grazed
10	Male	40–50	776	1000–1500	Outdoor 365 days/year
11	Female	30–40	687	400–500	Pasture and zero-grazed
12	Male	40–50	176	100–200	Organic and robotic milking
13	Male	40–50	283	800–1000	Zero-grazed
<b>Beef and Sheep</b>					
1	Male	60–70	178	600–700	Indoor-wintered
2	Male	40–50	438	200–300	Indoor-wintered
3	Male	30–40	236	200–300	Outdoor-wintered
4	Male	50–60	230	400–500	Outdoor-wintered
5	Female	30–40	4	<100	Indoor-wintered
6	Male	50–60	100	400–500	Outdoor-wintered
7	Male	40–50	1011	200–300	Indoor-wintered
8	Male	60–70	24	400–500	Outdoor-wintered
9	Male	40–50	500	1000–1500	Outdoor-wintered and Indoor-wintered
10	Prefer not to say	40–50	750	1000–1500	Indoor-wintered

(continued on next page)

**6. Conclusion**

This paper contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the good farmer concept in the context of animal welfare. It addresses the shortcomings of the cognitively oriented literature on farmers and animal welfare by uncovering good farmer ideals and symbols embedded in farmers’ practices. Knowing what symbolises good farming when it comes to animal welfare helps to better understand farmers’ welfare-related behaviours. Their “doing” of welfare and the emphasis they place on specific welfare-related activities (e.g. health management, physical environment) are inextricably linked to what, in their view, identifies them as good farmers. In addition, findings that reveal the impact that external factors (e.g. policy, supply chain demands) have on farmers’ good farmer identity may be particularly relevant to policy. It suggests that, where policies can be transformed by farmers into a symbol of skilled role performance, they may be more likely to adopt behaviours associated with that policy. Such findings may be important for policymakers regarding tackling complex issues such as climate change and sustainable food production.

**Credit author statement**

Belinda Vigors: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft. Francoise Wemelsfelder: Writing – review & editing. Alistair B. Lawrence: Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition.

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**Data availability**

The authors do not have permission to share data.

(continued)

Sector	Gender	Age	Farm Size (Ha)	Number of Animals	System
<b>Poultry (laying)</b>					
1	Male	30–40	141	10,000–15000	Free range and organic
2	Male	50–60	95	120,000–130,000	Free range
<b>Mixed</b>					
1	Male	40–50	54	200–300	Free range (pig and poultry), organic (all species), indoor-wintered (beef), outdoor-wintered (sheep)
2	Male	30–40	230	1000–1500	Free range (poultry), straw-housed (pig), outdoor-wintered (sheep)
<b>Pig</b>					
1	Male	30–40	555	2000–3000	Housed (slats and straw)

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