CONSUMER AWARENESS AND VALUE OF SHELTER PROVISION FOR CATTLE (*Bos taurus*) IN NEW ZEALAND

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INTRODUCTION

New Zealand cattle are farmed outside, exposing them to extreme weather events[1]. This can result in unnecessary suffering of cattle experiencing heat & cold stress which is likely to occur when no shelter is provided[2]. In NZs' Codes of Welfare for beef & dairy cattle, it is a minimum standard to have provision of shelter to minimise the effects of adverse weather[3,4]. The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) is aware that lack of shelter is an issue throughout the country, yet does not enforce the minimum standards that shelter must be provided for production cattle[5]. Money constraints is one of the discouraging factors stopping farmers from providing shelter for their cattle[5]. Consumer choice has & is continuing to shift due to the raising awareness of animal welfare[2].

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to determine:

- The current knowledge of the NZ general public towards the provision of shelter for cattle;
- How consumer choice may be theoretically influenced by the addressment of this issue;
- The importance of cow welfare to the NZ general public.

METHODOLODGY

An anonymous online survey was developed using Zoho.com.au & distributed via social media. Questions were focused on current awareness of shelter for cattle. how & if their opinions change with raised awareness & how their buying behaviour may be influenced by raising prices on common beef & dairy products.

RESULTS

Results showed that participants had noticed cattle exposed to extreme weather conditions, mostly heat (Fig 1). Fig 2 shows that 64% of participants indicated that they were willing to pay at least 5% more for milk which came from farms who provided shelter for their cows. Participants were also asked to rate the importance of shelter for cows to themselves on a scale from not at all important (1) to extremely important (10) both at the start & the end of the survey. The results of the initial question was a median value of 8, with the follow up question resulting in a median value of 9, indicating that educational snippets in the survey had an impact (Fig 3).

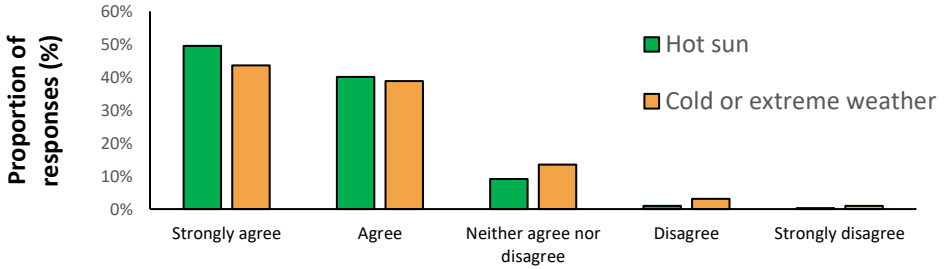

Fig 1. Likert question: I have noticed cows standing in a paddock without shelter in hot, cold or extreme weather (i.e. storms).

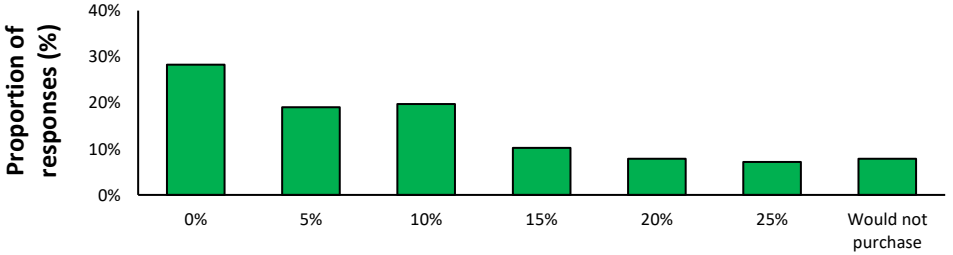

Fig 2. How much more are participants willing to pay on the average price of milk if the farms provide shelter?

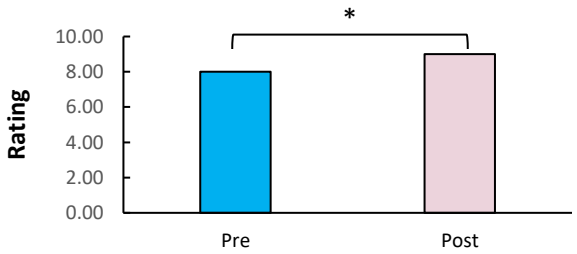

Fig 3. Median rating scores by the New Zealand public on the importance of shelter for cattle at the start (pre) and end (post) of the survey, with educational snippets provided through the survey. 1 = not at all important, 10 = extremely important.

Fig 4. (left) A common sight on NZ farms, cattle exposed to weather extremes (Kalisinski, 2021); (right) cattle crammed under the only shade available (McBride, 2018)

DISCUSSION

Our results show that New Zealanders are largely aware of the lack of shelter for cattle, are concerned about this issue, & are willing to pay more for products from cows that are provided with shelter. For some participants who had not previously considered this a welfare issue, they indicated that this survey provided them with information that changed their perspective. Our results also indicate that people would like to see efficient shelter which can protect entire herds, as opposed to tree belts or single trees (Fig 4).

These findings contradict MPI's stance on the issue. A recent report states that lack of consumer demand is stopping farmers from implementing shelter[5]. This has led to poor enforcement of this legal minimum standard. Given our results, it is clear that the NZ general public would be keen to see this change. Consumer choice has & is continuing to shift due to the raising awareness of animal welfare issues. With the addition of public pressure on this particular issue, we are hopeful that there is change coming in the future.

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