Transitioning Factory Farmers to Higher Welfare Farming or Farming without Animals

Summary

This intervention involves helping farmers to transition from factory farming to either higher-welfare or purely plant-based farming in a financially stable way. While there is evidence for this intervention, and it would also appeal to farmers' interests, it will likely be quite resource-intensive to run effectively. Also, Mercy For Animals is already running a very similar intervention. A positive externality of this intervention is that its collaborative approach may improve relationships between animal advocates and farmers.

Description of intervention

There is anecdotal evidence that many factory farmers do not like their jobs, are treated poorly, and find it difficult to escape once they've started the business [1]. By reaching out and offering financial support, we can help these farmers transition away from factory farming, enabling them to use their existing land and equipment to farm higher-welfare alternatives or in purely plant-based systems.

Biggest strengths and weaknesses of this intervention

- Strengths: the existing proof of concept, and that it relies on farmers acting on their own economic incentives.

- Weaknesses: the space seems crowded, not particularly cost-effective, and not easy to cheaply fund.

Summary of how the intervention scores on each criterion

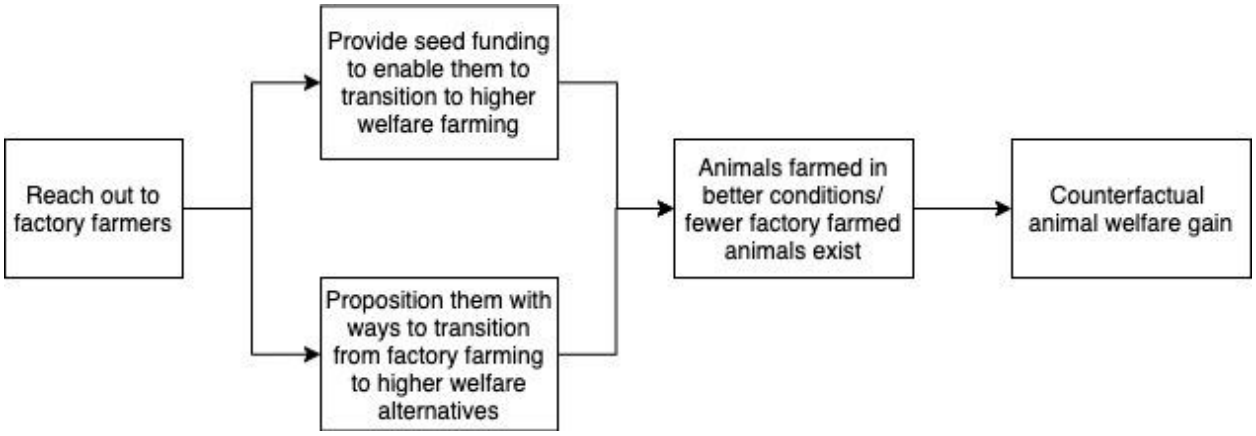
Animal	Problem	Idea	Score	Strength of idea	Limiting factors	Execution difficulty	Externalities
				2	1.5	1	0.5
Wild animals	Existence (net-negative lives)	Utility farms for small animals	21.8	3.5	4.5	4.5	7

Brief description of how the intervention performs on each criterion

Criteria	Ranking	Description
Strength of idea	3.5/10	Proof of concept exists through Garces' work [2], and enough traction for Mercy For Animals (MFA) to pick up the idea as a stand-alone program [3]. However, helping farmers transition to plant farming seems exceptionally time-intensive, and likely to require a lot of financial resources. Improving welfare standards might be easier, but the marginal gains here are less strong. Due to the time-intensive nature of this intervention, and because it requires outreach to individual farmers (i.e. operates on a much smaller scale than targeting companies through corporate outreach), I expect this intervention not to be very cost-effective.
Limiting factor	4.5/10	MFA's existing Transfarmation program would probably absorb most of the interest and funding from people interested in this specific area. I don't think they're hiring, and the specific expertise they're looking for is food policy experts, academics, etc. [3]. We

		also would need talented people to run and be part of the organization.
Execution difficulty	4.5/10	The existence of Transfarmation makes this difficult to start, as it's not clear what the advantage of another organization in this space is. Whoever runs this charity would probably need to be fairly adept at bridging social divides to do so well.
Externalities	7/10	The intervention shows how the relationship between animal activists and farmers can be positive-sum. Additionally, if a large fraction of farmers in one country do substantially better from switching to plant or higher-welfare farming, more farmers will be incentivized to switch.

Basic causal chain



Provisional conclusion

This intervention seems broadly unpromising because it is likely to be quite resource-intensive, and Mercy For Animals is already running a similar intervention.

References

1. Kristof N. Opinion. The New York Times [Internet]. 2014 Dec 4 [cited 2020 Jan 21]; Available from: https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/04/opinion/nicholas-kristof-abusing-chickens-we-eat.html

2. GRILLED: Turning Adversaries into Allies to Change the Chicken Industry by Mercy For Animals President Leah Garcés [Internet]. Mercy For Animals. 2019 [cited 2020 Jan 21]. Available from: https://mercyforanimals.org/grilled

3. Animals MF. Transfarmation Project [Internet]. Transfarmation Project. [cited 2020 Jan 21]. Available from: https://thetransfarmationproject.org/