



PRESS RELEASE

A doctoral thesis unveils how the dairy industry normalizes and naturalizes the exploitation of cows through discourse”

‘Interest Groups, Discourse and Food Orientations. The Case of the European Dairy Industry’ is Ph.D. research defended by María Ruiz Carreras at Pompeu Fabra University.

The doctoral dissertation shows that the dairy industry adapts its discourse to current public concerns regarding the environment, animal welfare and health, while contradicting this discourse with its activity

The results show that interest groups normalize and naturalize the exploitation of cows, who are sentient beings, denying both the interests of cows and their offspring through a representation that objectifies them and obviates their ability for sentience, autonomy and individuality.

UPF-Centre for Animal Ethics, December 16th 2021

The doctoral thesis *Interest Groups, Discourse and Food Orientations. The Case of the European Dairy Industry* was defended by María Ruiz Carreras at the Department of Communication at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona (Spain). The research has been supervised by doctor Núria Almiron (UPF-Centre for Animal Ethics and Critical Communication-CritiCC) and awarded with the honorary International Mention and an excellent cum laude.

- This research shows that the dairy industry adapts its discourse to current public concerns regarding the environment, animal welfare and health, while contradicting it with its praxis.
- For the doctoral research, 92 documents from the main European dairy industry interest groups were analyzed, as well as carrying out an analysis of the sector’s political economy and a series of interviews with experts.

- The research shows how interest groups normalize and naturalize the exploitation of cows, denying the interests of cows through a representation that objectifies and obviates their ability for sentience, autonomy and individuality.
- The study shows that the industry leaves cow calves completely out of its discourse, despite the fact that they are a fundamental part of the dairy production; if cows do not give birth to calves, they won't produce any milk, being that the reason for farmers to inseminate them each year.
- The results of the thesis show that the normalization and naturalization of cows is carried out through the reiteration of persuasive messages grounded on scientific language and appeals to health.
- Throughout the investigation it has been found that the dairy industry disqualifies the plant substitutes for dairy products. Once again, this speech contradicts their praxis, since at the present the majority of dairy companies are opening their range of products to dairy substitutes.
- The study shows that European dairy industry interest groups construct a discourse in which they praise the official dietary recommendations while trying to influence their elaboration.
- This doctoral research collects information on how the dairy industry has as targets specific groups of consumers, specifically children, women and the elderly. To these targets the industry addresses messages stressing the need to consume any type of dairy product and the impossibility to healthy replace these with plant-based products.

Images for journalists, courtesy of Aitor Garmendia (Tras los Muros), available for download and use at the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y1arDIPivABXuPnz7kbzfIRS0urxWX2A/view?usp=sharing>

For further information, please check the executive summary in the UPF-CAE website or the full thesis at <https://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/672682?locale-attribute=en>

CONTACT DETAILS

María Ruiz Carreras.

Communication Department, Universitat Pompeu Fabra

UPF-Centre for Animal Ethics, Barcelona

Full dissertation: <https://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/672682?locale-attribute=en>

Web: <https://www.upf.edu/web/cae-center-for-animal-ethics>

E-mail: maria.ruiz@kom.lu.se

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mericarreras> / https://twitter.com/UPF_CAE

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/upfcae>