

## ETHICS GUIDELINES

# Research with Farm Animals in Sanctuary Settings

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The research program at Farm Sanctuary is multi-disciplinary, collaborative, and designed to help us reach our mission to end animal agriculture and foster just and compassionate vegan living. We fight the disastrous effects of animal agriculture on animals, the environment, social justice, and public health through rescue, education, and advocacy. All research at Farm Sanctuary must be designed and carried out with the animal residents' needs, preferences, desires, health, and safety as top priorities and will either improve welfare, restore agency to the residents, or both. Research should be designed in such a way as to indicate an awareness that standard scientific assumptions either directly or indirectly contribute to the instrumentalization of animal subjects. For example, many research projects highlight the ways that nonhuman animals are similar to humans, but this notion serves to create a hierarchy, with humans at the top and those like humans more deserving of our compassion. Research with sanctuary residents should express equal respect for all species as well as individual differences between members of the same species. These guidelines are designed to support these goals, must be followed during any and all research activities, and apply to both human and other animal participants.

- 1.** All invasive research is prohibited. Invasive research is defined as any research that causes suffering or harm. This is not limited to physical harm. Social, behavioral, psychological, and economic harms to any person (animal or other, not solely study participants) must also be considered and avoided. Examples of harm include, but are not limited to, forced participation in research, painful medical procedures like blood draws for the sole purpose of research, and exposure to aversive stimuli.
- 2.** Biological samples may be obtained and utilized, on a study by study basis as approved by the Research with the Animals Advisory Committee (RAAC), if collected as part of routine healthcare or noninvasively (e.g., fecal samples).
- 3.** Observational and other noninvasive forms of behavioral studies that involve no aversive stimulation or elicit no sign of distress from the participants are acceptable, as long as they do not harm the participants, utilize provision of substandard care to elicit motivation (e.g., food deprivation cannot be used to encourage participation), erode trust, or compromise the dignity of the participants. If participants need to be separated from their group to participate in research, that must be done voluntarily, and the needs of their group mates should also be assessed and considered.
- 4.** The RAAC will serve to identify potential harms that could result from research, as part of the proposal review process.
- 5.** Residents must be recognized as persons and always be provided with choice and control over their participation in an experimental study.<sup>1</sup> Coercion of any kind is prohibited, including altering animal care prior to the study to make the study more attractive to participants. Positive operant conditioning (i.e., animal learning opportunities) may be used during research as a way to provide the participant with increased control and/or cognitive stimulation that is often lacking in a captive environment.<sup>2</sup> Research that requires active participation from the

participants should not move forward without participant consent, which will be determined by voluntary participation in the research and careful observation of body language.<sup>3</sup>

**6.** Participants must benefit from the research, either during the study (meaning the methods provide an enjoyable, enriching experience) or long-term (such as changing the way society views and treats farm animals and/or a positive effect long-term on individual and/or group welfare).

**7.** Reciprocity between researchers and study participants should be sought.<sup>4</sup> Participants should be viewed as co-creators of knowledge and researchers should consider the power dynamics of the researcher/participant relationship by actively working to shift the power balance in favor of the participant. When seeking to create knowledge about the animals, researchers must be open to learning directly from the animals.<sup>1</sup>

**8.** Data collection methods and theoretical frameworks must be appropriate to animal subjects, sometimes diverging with methodologies used in human-focused research. For example, because we do not speak the same language as our residents, research requires more purposeful observation to obtain the same information that would otherwise be obtained through verbal human communication. Particular attention should thus be given to learning, and listening to, the communication patterns of the participants.<sup>1</sup>

**9.** In cases where research uncovers benefits to the participants, Farm Sanctuary will explore ways to offer those benefits to all residents upon conclusion of the study.

**10.** Studies that meet at least one of the following criteria require Research with the Animals Advisory Committee approval:

- The study results will be communicated externally.
- Biological samples will be used.

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# Publication of Research

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Once data collection is complete, the following guidelines should be addressed when drafting a manuscript for publication. All researchers must agree in writing, prior to beginning any research, to abide by these guidelines. Farm Sanctuary reserves the right to review their manuscripts and/or other public-facing written documents prior to publication.

- 1.** The researchers must consider the ways in which information about human or other animal participants may be used by members of the public, examining historical, political, and cultural contexts and recognizing that even public adoration, fascination, and curiosity can lead to suffering and exploitation. If potential harms are identified, confidentiality should be granted through removal of the participant's name, background, health, family ties, or other identifying information.
- 2.** However, participants (human or other animal) should also be acknowledged as co-creators of knowledge. This recognition can be included in the "Methods" or "Acknowledgements" sections, for example, highlighting the contributions of each individual whenever possible.
- 3.** Researchers should be cautious, respectful, and reflexive while challenging human exceptionalism. Researchers should acknowledge that they have taken on the responsibility of translators who are speaking on behalf of the nonhuman

animal participants without their explicit consent, express humility in this work, and recognize that animals are agents with unique experiences and personalities.

**4.** Perpetuations of stereotypes and prejudices used to justify the continued oppression of farm animals and/or to further legitimize the human/animal dichotomy must be avoided. Researchers should center the nonhuman animal participants as agents and unique individuals, recognizing their dignity, and highlighting individual differences when possible.

**5.** The histories of the animal individuals, as well as their species, must be considered in interpretation of the data and reporting of conclusions.<sup>1</sup>



## Sources

**1** Abrell, E. & Gruen, L. Ethics and Animal Ethnography Working Paper. Wesleyan Animal Studies (Fall 2020).

<https://www.wesleyan.edu/animalstudies/WASEvents/ethicsethnography.html>

**2** Meehan, C. L. & Mench, J. A. The challenge of challenge: Can problem solving opportunities enhance animal welfare? *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 102, 246–261 (2007).

**3** Horowitz, A. Considering the 'Dog' in Dog-Human Interaction. *Front Vet Sci* 8, 642821 (2021).

**4** Van Patter, L. E. & Blattner, C. Advancing Ethical Principles for Non-Invasive, Respectful Research with Nonhuman Animal Participants. *Soc. Anim.* 28, 171–190 (2020).