

Framing PETA and McDonald's: Assessing the Causes of Industry-Driven Farm Animal Welfare Measures

"I think it would be a great thing if, you know, all these fast food outlets and these slaughterhouses and these laboratories and the bans that fund them exploded tomorrow."

-Bruce Friedrich, (then) PETA dir. of vegan outreach (Specter 2002)

"If you're not going to say nice things about them no matter what...corporations have no reason to ever change their practices."

-Bruce Friedrich, (now) PETA Vice President, praising McDonald's decision to phase out growth-promoting antibiotics in its beef supply (Sanchez 2003)

Background. The new millennium has brought with it a sea of change in how activists and companies interact; whereas activist organizations previously sought to influence corporate behavior primarily through lobbying and boycotts, many activist organizations now choose to work with rather than against the companies of which they are critical. (Browne and Schweikhard 2001) This trend is most pronounced in the formation of alliances between environmental groups and corporations,¹ (*Economist* 2008) but a comparable relationship may be emerging between animal activists and the giants of food retailing. Using a two year-long exchange between PETA and McDonald's over farm animal welfare standards as a policy template, this paper examines two aspects of the role of stakeholder motivation in causing industry-driven change: assessing whether animal advocacy groups are pursuing this trend towards collaboration, and identifying the primary causal drivers of McDonald's improved hen welfare standards.

¹ Examples include alliances between: IKEA and the Rainforest Alliance/WWF/the Forest Stewardship Council; Marriott International's and Conservation International to protect the Amazon rainforest.

The nascent trend towards dialogue between activists and food retailers may have first occurred when Henry Spira approached McDonald's in 1989. Although their five-year negotiation period did not substantially improve animal welfare, Spira did persuade McDonald's to distribute a "Humane Treatment of Animals" recommendation to their suppliers which was also published in their annual report. Spira was also partially responsible for convincing Bob Langert, McDonald's current Vice President of Corporate Responsibility, to improve McDonald's suppliers' treatment of animals. Perhaps most important was Spira's success in establishing a line of communication between an industry leader and animal activists, which paved the way for others, including PETA.

In 1997, McDonald's took a serious wrong turn when they sued two Greenpeace England campaigners for libel. (McLibel 1999) The defendants, Helen Steel and Dave Morris, were sued for handing out pamphlets that accused McDonalds of exploiting its workers, manipulating children's minds, destroying the rainforest, and being cruel to animals. The case was the longest in the history of the English court system.

Although McDonald's won the case, the defendants won the animal cruelty claims at the trial level: the judge condemned the company for being "culpably responsible" for cruel practices with broiler chickens, layer hens, and sows, and for slaughter methods. And following the verdict, McDonald's never pursued an injunction—their alleged reason for suing the defendants in the first place. The case was particularly groundbreaking because it held a corporation responsible for how their *suppliers* treated their poultry and swine, on the premise that McDonald's was in a position where it could use its influence to prohibit certain practices with little economic loss to the company. The ruling garnered massive negative attention to the corporation's

treatment of animals, weakening the company's public image.² Peter Singer argues in *Ethics into Action* that "in public relations terms, the trial was a disaster." (1998).

After the trial, McDonald's hired animal welfare scientist Dr. Temple Grandin, which eventually resulted in the implementation of Dr. Grandin's animal welfare auditing system. After finding unacceptable standards of animal welfare at a majority of slaughterhouses, Dr. Grandin developed quantitative methods of measuring animal welfare, which appealed to McDonald's business model and in part allowed them to strengthen their recently damaged public image. (goveg.com, Zwerdling 2002^b),

PETA took advantage of this weakness and decided to open communications with the company (Friedrich 1997). They asked McDonald's to implement six changes (goveg.com McCruelty Campaign, hereafter goveg.com):

1. Give chickens at least one and one-half square feet of living space, as recommended by the USDA.
2. Stop selling eggs from hens housed in battery cages.
3. Require improved standards for chicken transport and slaughter.
4. Stop using genetically altered birds that suffer from painful leg deformities.
5. Purchase pigs only from farms which provide their breeding sows with room to move around outdoors, and which do not confine them indoor to cement cells, unable to turn around.
6. Include a vegetarian burger at all McDonald's restaurants.

Communication between the groups lasted for two years; none of PETA's requests were met to their satisfaction. As a result, in 1999 PETA launched a coordinated international "McCruelty" campaign against McDonald's. According to PETA, they initiated their campaign because their demands were not being met at an acceptable rate (goveg.com).

McDonald's soon found themselves under attack on various fronts. Still suffering from the McLibel aftermath—and now the target of a full-fledged PETA campaign—they

²) This is why, in the *Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies*, Del Brasio and Gregory note that the company's size and position make it an easy target. (2008) That Steel and Morris were also legally and financially outmatched in every possible way contributed to the image of the underdog and the global corporation, an image which the anti-globalization movement used to great effect.

were also being targeted by anti-globalization protests: a McDonald's restaurant in Belgium was firebombed, one in Poland was stink-bombed, and French farmers were coordinating protests in Europe. (The London Independent, Zwerdling 2002^a) The company also faced growing competition from Burger King and Wendy's.

It is clear that various factors were in play when, eleven months after PETA launched their McCruelty campaign, McDonald's issued mandatory animal welfare guidelines to all of their suppliers. Langert claims that their motivation has largely been the company's desire to "do the right thing." Langert also states that their delayed time in pursuing this change was because they needed to get to the "heart and feelings and emotions" on the people they deal with, and activist groups often want a quick fix. He told the Associated Press that their guidelines are "a pathway to be a leader on the issue," and that they have been "a natural evolution" for the corporation. (Associated Press 2000)

PETA disagrees, claiming that activist pressure in the form of "Unhappy Meals" caused the change. Ingrid Newkirk, PETA's founder, asserts that their distribution to children "sent a chill up [McDonald's] spine." Only months before the guideline implementation, PETA spoke to McDonald's shareholders, condemning their welfare standards (GoVeg.com campaign history). In response, Langert claims that PETA's tactics are ineffective in educating the public, provide misinformation, and are inaccurate.

Literature Review. Because PETA and McDonald's have espoused very different reasons for why McDonald's has become an industry role model in the development of improved FAW standards, (Zwerdling 2002^a) it is useful to examine the literature surrounding the possible motivating factors. Two alternative explanations

predominate for why McDonald's—and, later, other food retailers³—has taken up FAW:

- 1) they were responding to activist pressure that had damaging reputational effects, and
- 2) they were responding to internal experts and animal welfare boards in order to be an industry leader in all aspects of corporate social responsibility, which includes FAW.

The literature on responding to activism gravitates around the disciplines of public relations research and mass communication. Drawing on J.E. Grunig's situational theory of publics and Hazleton and Long's public relations process model, Werder (2006) uses the PETA/McDonald's events circa 2000 to evaluate which public relations strategies work best under which conditions.⁴ The underlying assumption is that the actions of activist organizations do matter to companies, if only because they seek to manage or preempt adverse reputational effects. In the case of PETA/McDonald's, additionally, the "shock tactics" employed by PETA (Klein 2000, Hamnett 2004) inevitably do damage to the company in question's public goodwill.

As was intimated above, McDonald's has also become the primary target of the worldwide anti-globalization movement and its various offshoots,⁵ which constitute a diverse coalition of social and environmental justice causes that are linked by their opposition to neoliberal international financial institutions and global corporate power. For many, the McLibel trial and the attack on a McDonald's store by French sheep

³ Companies and individuals to follow McDonald's lead include: Burger King, Chipotle, and Wolfgang Puck. The case of Burger King shows the influence of both potential explanations: on one hand, Burger King acknowledged that their policy changes were made subsequent to discussions with PETA and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS); on the other hand, the Burger King VP for Food Safety asserted that the company relied primarily on its animal welfare advisory board. (Martin 2007)

⁴ "Specifically, [Werder] seeks to determine the influence of informative, persuasive, facilitative, promise and reward, threat and punishment, cooperative problem solving, and bargaining strategies on individuals' problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility toward an organization responding to activism." (Werder 2006, 336)

⁵ The Slow Food movement, for example, was created in response to the opening of a McDonald's branch in Rome's Piazza di Spagna.

farmer Jose Bové together epitomize the movement's targets and heroes, respectively; even president Chirac and prime minister Jospin indicated support for Bové's illegal actions. (Gordon and Meunier 2001) However, because the demands of the anti-globalization movement tend to challenge the fundamental workings of the international system rather than any specific McDonald's practice per se, it may be unlikely that McDonald's could directly respond to protestors' criticisms. (Oestreich 2002)

Instead, corporate strategies utilized by McDonald's have been studied to understand overall trends in corporate policy making. An increasing number of companies, including McDonald's, are publishing corporate responsibility reports. (Baron 2007, De Blasio and Gregory 2008) Whereas the activism-driven model focuses on the centrality of companies' responding to activist pressure, the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) model prioritizes proactive behavior in a variety of domains and for a variety of motives. Skapinger (2008) supports "CSR as a form of reputational risk management", laying out three types of benefits that accrue to socially responsible corporations: reputational benefits, the development of new markets, and cost-saving. A primary purpose of this paper is to see which model predominates in this case.

Methods. The framework for the content analysis is as follows: we examine sources that are attributable either to PETA or to McDonald's in light of the sociopolitical environment at the time, and we analyze McDonald's welfare changes and PETA's influence by using publicized statements from, and dialogue between, each group. This data is then situated against the social, political, and economic background existing up to and during the 1999-2000 exchange, with a special focus on the following four 'context

indicators': activist pressure from PETA, CSR, the McLibel case, and animal welfare science. With this supplemental information, the framing put forth by both parties can be examined for validity, coherence and consistency. The dual purposes of this analysis, then, are: to determine whether McDonald's changed practices were caused by PETA's campaign, by other factors at play, or by a combination of the two; and to examine whether this case demonstrates a collaborative or antagonistic relationship between activists and corporations in the domain of animal protection.

Specifically, we focus on three domains of primary source literature:

- 1) Information available on the McDonald's web site media center ⁶ (http://www.crmcdonalds.com/publish/csr/home/report/sustainable_supply_chain/animal_welfare.html and <http://www.mcdonalds.com/usa/good/products.html>, accessed on 11/16/2008), which outline company policies on laying hen guidelines, animal welfare guiding principles, and the McDonald's Animal Welfare Council.
- 2) The back-and-forth written history of the "McCruelty Campaign History" (http://goveg.com/corp_mccruelty_history.asp, accessed on 11/16/2008). These documents also address the motives of PETA and McDonald's stakeholders.
- 3) Direct quotes from PETA or McDonald's spokespersons as gleaned from other print media sources (see **Appendix A** for a complete list of sources used), as well as the text of an email sent from a PETA spokesperson in response to our queries.

The examination focuses on the views and opinions of the following stakeholders:

For PETA:

- Ingrid Newkirk, president of PETA
- Bruce Friedrich, PETA vegetarian campaign coordinator
- Steven Jay Gross, unpaid consultant for PETA

For McDonald's:

- Bob Langert, (now) McDonald's VP for Corporate Responsibility

⁶ The information available on the McDonald's website is being used as the authoritative company line, especially in light of a McDonald's spokesperson's response to our e-query: "Thank you for taking the time to write to McDonald's. We always appreciate hearing from students, and we're flattered you've chosen our company for your school project...In response to your request, please visit www.mcdonalds.com. Our website contains numerous pages on a wide variety of McDonald's business topics. If you cannot find the information you are looking for on our website, then the information is either not available or it is considered proprietary/confidential... Oftentimes, students ask very specific questions about McDonald's sales, strategies and product information. However, due to the highly competitive nature of the quick service restaurant industry, we simply cannot respond to students' questions of this nature... We hope our website will answer your questions about McDonald's. Once again, thank you for writing and our best wishes for a successful assignment."

- Jack Greenberg, (then) McDonald's Chairman-CEO
- Bruce Feinberg, Sr. Director of McDonald's US Quality Systems
- Walt Riker, McDonald's public relations spokesman

Independent Actors:

- Peter Singer, independent ethicist
- Henry Spira, independent activist
- Temple Grandin, animal welfare scientist working for McDonald's

This array of sources and stakeholders is then situated in relation to the four context indicators: negative reputational effects from **activist pressure** by PETA; the burgeoning anti-globalization movement, as reflected specifically in light of the **McLibel** ruling; the growing trend towards Corporate Social Responsibility (**CSR**); and the growth of **animal welfare science** as championed—for McDonald's—by Temple Grandin. Given the global complexity of the situation in question, a range of other factors undoubtedly exist. Nonetheless, we focus on the above context indicators in order to present a focused but balanced understanding of the dialogue between McDonald's and PETA, the corporation's implementation of welfare changes, and the subsequent claims made by both parties regarding the motivating factors underlying these welfare reforms.

The analysis will be conducted as follows: if a party makes a statement that agrees with or is in direct conflict with one or many of the context indicators, or if there is a chance that extraneous factors may have had a significant influence in the welfare reform, then the claim will be examined in light of those indicators. Additionally, claims are monitored for reliability by looking at the relevant history; if a McDonald's representative makes a claim about the motivation for establishing guidelines and this claim is at odds with a preponderance of relevant actions, then the credibility of the statement is examined.

By juxtaposing statements with significant context indicators, we approach a robust vision of the interaction between PETA and McDonald's. This method allows us

to: 1) show how each party has stated the situation; 2) evaluate whether the aforementioned statements are consistent with the relevant factors in play; and 3) discuss whether these claims are strengthened or weakened by the contexts in question.

Results: McLibel. Interestingly, the two demands met by McDonald's that were presented goveg.com back-and-forth were precisely those things that Justice Bell had condemned a year earlier. Bell considered the stocking density of birds in battery cages to be particularly cruel, stating, "I conclude that the battery system described to me is cruel in respect of the almost total restraint of the birds and the incidence of broken bones when they are taken for slaughter." (Wolfson 1999) These concerns were addressed in the guidelines; McDonald's increased the cage space of battery hens and provided incentives for workers who did not break bones while handling birds during slaughter.

It is difficult to say whether Justice Bell was the main influence for McDonald's addressing these issues in their guidelines, however, for upon the trial's conclusion, PETA's Chief Executive Officer Mike Quinlan issued a letter to McDonald's requesting that the corporation enact six changes, two of them being the same issues raised by Bell. A third variable comes into play when one notes that it was Temple Grandin who suggested, during a post-McLibel meeting between Grandin, Langert, and PETA representative Steven Gross, that McDonald's offer financial incentives to workers who break fewer bones during slaughter. Although Grandin's idea was implemented, it is questionable whether McDonald's would have provided financial incentives if Justice Bell had not reprimanded the corporation for their high instances of bone breaks.

Differences in McDonald's actions before and after the trial also suggest that the trial sparked an interest in animal welfare. During the trial, McDonald's Chief Purchasing Officer admitted that the animal welfare policy McDonald's followed was simply a matter of compliance with national laws. (Wolfson 1999) When an animal policy statement that they had sent to their suppliers (this was their deal with Spira in the late 80's) was brought up, Justice Bell dismissed it, stating, "This statement is in the most general terms. It reads more like a public relations hand-out" (Wolfson 1999) Similarly, three months prior to the McLibel verdict, after years of communications with activist Henry Spira, Shelby Yastrow, McDonald's General Counsel, told Spira that "farm animal well-being is not high on McDonald's priority list". (Singer 1998 p. 172) Immediately after the verdict, however, Yastrow's interest in farm animal welfare increased enough to fly to New York and meet with Spira; soon thereafter, McDonald's commissioned Temple Grandin to survey suppliers (and eventually develop her auditing system) and created a full-time staff position dedicated to animal welfare. (Singer 1998)

At the end of seven years of trial, McDonald's reputation was damaged. Although the corporation won the case, Morris and Steel won the case against animal cruelty at the trial level. Despite spending approximately sixteen million dollars on the best legal representation available to combat two *pro se* activists with a combined annual salary of USD \$12,000, McDonald's did not emerge with a clear win. (Wolfson 1999) The corporation's sudden changes in attitude, their actions following the verdict, and the parallels between Justice Bell's issues of concern and the layer-hen guidelines strongly point towards the McLibel trial as a dominant context indicator.

Results: Animal Welfare Science (AWS). As stated previously, McDonald's hired Dr. Grandin with the intention of implementing her objective scoring system during audits of McDonald's meat suppliers. Dr. Grandin was also recruited to accompany Bob Langert to the meetings with PETA representative Steven Jay Gross. Our analysis assumes that if McDonald's changed its welfare standards based on the AWS recommendations suggested by Dr. Temple Grandin, Dr. Joy Mench, or another of the scientists hired by McDonald's to evaluate and quantify animal welfare standards, then the improvements made by McDonald's will directly reflect those recommendations.

In the first meeting between PETA and McDonald's, Dr. Grandin stated that: "current practice of catching chickens leads to a high incidence of broken wings, legs, etc." and that "one can measure the incidence of such events and offer an incentive to workers during collection for having a low incidence of broken wings, legs," and so forth. Dr. Grandin also cited incentive plans that were currently being used in Britain that appeared to be effective in reducing the incidence of trauma to chickens. (goveg.com) Additionally, regarding laying hens, McDonald's paid its suppliers more for their eggs to cover the cost of welfare improvements such as increased space allocations, eliminating "force molting"⁷, and debeaking. (www.crmcdonalds.com/publish/csr/home/report, Zwerdling 2002^a)

In the second PETA/McDonald's meeting, Dr. Grandin "expressed her belief that six animal welfare variables would be monitored."⁸ In reference to her 1st animal welfare

⁷ A practice that involves removing food from a hen to induce stress that will increase her egg production.

⁸ 1) Animals should be stunned properly (Temple noted that she perceives a three percent failure rate as good, though the better slaughterhouses achieve closer to one percent); 2) Animals should be insensible to pain on the bleed rail; 3) Animals should not be vocalizing at any point in the process; 4) Animals should be minimally prodded electrically; 5) Animals should not slip or fall at any point in the process;

6) "Downer" animals should not be dragged or struck in sensitive areas of their bodies.

variable, which states that animals should be stunned properly, McDonald's Poultry Board recommended that McDonald's continue to support—but does not require—its broiler chicken suppliers' to use both Controlled Atmospheric Killing (CAK)⁹ and electrical stunning. (www.crmcdonalds.com/publish/csr/home/report) Additionally, Dr. Grandin's suggestion in the third PETA/McDonald's meeting—that slaughter facilities should put a second stunner on the stunning line—has generally gone unheeded.

In the cattle and sow industries, the 1st – 6th variables were all attended to by McDonalds suppliers using Dr. Grandin's measurement system (Zwerdling 2002^b). She later stated that conditions regarding these issues significantly improved within McDonald's supplying facilities: "Grandin says when she started these audits a few years ago, the workers who shoot the bolts were missing a lot" and were cited by federal inspectors for "skinning animals that were still alive". (Zwerdling 2002^b) After following Dr. Grandin's suggestions, Zwerdling (2002^b) found the kill platform of a slaughterhouse to be completely void of stressful vocalizations, which also gave a clear indication that McDonald's suppliers were implementing Dr. Grandin's recommendations.

However, while her set of conditions have improved McDonald's welfare standards, it was suggested in a discussion between Peter Singer and Dr. Grandin that these changes were already in the making prior to Dr. Grandin's recruitment. Dr. Grandin commented, "you could tell by looking at it whether a slaughterhouse was a McDonald's supplier. They were better maintained, and they avoided handling the worst of the "downers" - cattle who arrive at the slaughterhouse so weak that they cannot stand, and

⁹A USDA-approved method of slaughter that is described by animal welfare experts as "the most stress-free, humane method of killing poultry ever developed." (CNN/Money, 2004)

therefore have to be dragged off the truck with a rope.” (Singer 1998) Dr. Grandin may thus have merely supported the changes that McDonald’s was already initiating.

Beyond the McDonald’s/PETA negotiations, the influence of AWS on laying-hen welfare was clarified by Dr. Mench. In Zwerdling (2002^a), Dr. Mench laid out the guidelines she helped establish to increase cage size/space, and to stop debeaking and force molting. McDonald’s included these guidelines in their notice¹⁰ to their egg suppliers, potentially confirming that McDonald’s needed exact measurements in order to implement change in animal welfare standards. (Zwerdling 2002^a)¹¹

There is consensus among activists and McDonald’s corporate circle that Drs. Grandin and Mench have had a large impact on animal welfare in factory farms. In Zwerdling (2002^b), Langert admitted that “eventually, an activist convinced him to call Temple Grandin...and she changed everything.” He also stated that until Grandin came along, all he kept hearing was rhetoric. The activists kept telling him, “Slaughterhouses are cruel, they should be more humane,” but Langert claimed “McDonald's needed more than that: they needed to learn how to measure brutality, so they could figure out how to fix it.” (Zwerdling,2002^b) Besides Langert’s public statements, PETA’s Newkirk confirmed that belief by independently stating that Dr. Grandin “is without question the most influential person in the American meat industry today” and has “done more to reduce suffering in the world than any other person who has ever lived.” (Specter 2003)

¹⁰ McDonald's sent a letter to the 27 suppliers who sell them 1.5 billion eggs a year, outlining guidelines for improvements to the living conditions of their laying hens, McDonalds spokesman Walt Riker said. The company will require that each hen be given 50 percent more space within its cage, to 72 square inches (464.5 square centimeters) per bird. McDonald's is also banning the practice of "forced molting," in which farmers withhold food and water for five to fourteen days to increase production. (Agence Free Press 2000)

¹¹ Also see www.mcdonalds.com/usa/good/products/hen.html to view the “Summary of McDonald’s USA Laying Hens Guidelines”

The agreement between these two conflicting perspectives, as well as the previously stated examples of recommendations put forth and the partial (but not complete) implementation enacted by McDonalds, shows support for the argument that AWS made it possible for McDonald's to persuade their suppliers to follow the guidelines. It is, however, still not enough to support the claim that AWS was the driving force toward the public endorsement of the guidelines and recommendations, since the initial inspiration to recruit animal welfare scientists was more likely attributable to the negative public image McDonald's was suffering from at the time.

Results: Corporate Social Responsibility. Because the goveg.com McCruelty history only tangentially hints at McDonald's motivations for engaging with animal welfare, it is necessary to look both at the McDonald's website and at the sources in Appendix A to appreciate the company's stand on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In the aftermath of the McLibel trial and the turn-of-the-millennium anti-globalization movement's impact on McDonald's, the company has since devoted substantial attention to social, environmental, and animal welfare concerns; this was most likely a means to maintain reputation (Skapinger's first CSR incentive) and brand loyalty.

Looking only at the McDonald's CSR blog and at statements made by McDonald's spokesman Walt Riker and employee Bob Langert—who was Director for Environmental affairs in the 1990s, Senior Director of Public and Community Affairs during the pre-McCruelty negotiations, and is currently Vice President for Corporate Responsibility—paints a very different picture about corporate motivation. To begin with statements by Langert and Riker: according to Langert:

- “Costs have not been a driving factor with this whole initiative...in terms of a framework, this all starts with implementing the best animal practices, doing the right thing and cost is a part of the whole process, a part we’re still trying to figure out.” (Zwerdling 2002^a)
- “This is our pathway to be a leader on this issue” (Dejevsky 2002)
- “There is more to life than just the products we use and buy. People want to know they are visiting a company that stands for something, that cares about the world...and standards of decency matter.” (Specter 2003)
- “[For us, the laying-hen improvements were] a natural evolution from our animal welfare program” (Brasher 2000)

And according to Riker:

- “Our main concern is the well-being of the hens because the more we looked at it, the more we heard from the scientific experts, we thought this was the right thing to do” (Agence France Press 2000)
- “PETA had absolutely nothing to do with our decision on improving conditions for egg-laying hens...[we] tried to have a good-faith dialogue, [but PETA ended the talks]”. (Klein 2000)

In Langert and Riker’s vision, good corporate practice and input from animal welfare science, not PETA, were the drivers behind McDonald’s actions. (Zwerdling 2002^a)

However, taking another example mentioned by Langert in the Zwerdling interview exposes the limits of good behavior at the expense of, in this case, reputation: Langert’s earlier collaboration with Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), which was otherwise productive, involved a switch to unbleached recycled paper bags. Later, however, McDonald’s reverted to the use of bleached bags due to customer concern over cleanliness. It appears that McDonald’s might not care about costs (the third of Skapinger’s incentives) if they are able to get reputation or new markets, but environmental action without marketable benefit to the company seems less likely.

It is also telling to contrast the McDonald’s blog and website’s focus on environmental responsibility—which are prominently highlighted throughout as part of a general green marketing campaign¹²—with the site’s more muted focus on animal

¹² See, for example, http://mcdonalds.com/corp/about/factsheets.RowPar.0001.ContentPar.0001.ColumnPar.0017.File1.tmp/EnvironRespEnglish_LOW_CSR_Fact_Sheet.pdf.

welfare in the 2008 Corporate Responsibility report;¹³ the report contains many pages pertaining to environmental and social CSR concerns, but only two brief mention of animal welfare (relating to supplier plant audits, the Animal Welfare Guiding Principles, and Temple Grandin). This observation is in line with recent work indicating that fast-food business responses to animal activists are “low-key” responses meant to satisfy the pressuring group rather than hypervisible green marketing campaigns. (Adams 2008)

Results: Activist Pressure. In October of 1999, after three meetings with McDonald’s representatives, PETA cut off negotiations with the corporation and launched their McCruelty campaign. Upon the release of McDonald’s laying hen guidelines in 2000, PETA called off their campaign, deeming it a success. A series of direct quotes by the group exemplifies their view:

- “After 11 months of PETA’s intensive campaign against McDonald’s... McDonald’s has *agreed* to make the following major improvements...” (goveg.com, italics added)
- “While there’s no way to get inside the heads of McDonald’s executives, I think the fact that the changes they made came after we launched a massive boycott and they negotiated with us indicates that our boycott is what compelled them to make changes (they never seemed inclined to take animal welfare seriously before our boycott.)” (October 2008, Personal correspondence between PETA and the authors)
- “Just the very idea that we had taken their trademark Happy Meal and converted it into an unhappy meal frightened them. Suddenly they didn’t want children coming near the restaurants where they would see PETA protestors standing in the kiddy playgrounds with the Unhappy Meal in hand. That sent a chill up McDonald’s spine.” (quote by PETA president Ingrid Newkirk; Zwerdling 2002^a)

However, PETA’s reasons for cutting off negotiations and subsequently claiming a “victory” over the McDonald’s corporation do not completely align with their campaign’s demands and the welfare improvements that the corporation eventually implemented. PETA’s reasons for a campaign launch was due to McDonald’s unwillingness to: 1) address farm welfare issues; 2) approve unannounced audits; 3) ask

¹³ Available online at: <http://www.crmcdonalds.com/publish/csr/home/report.html>.

plants to meet USDA standards for stunning; 4) ask plants to comply with Temple Grandin's suggestions (such as hiring a second stunner); and 5) impose sanctions for violations of slaughterhouse recommendations.

When McDonald's issued their guidelines eleven months later, different issues were addressed. The corporation did address farm animal welfare issues, but only for laying hens. They did not approve unannounced audits, nor did they officially comply with USDA stunning standards. And although they did initiate Grandin's plan to provide financial incentives for workers who handled birds more gently during slaughter, they did not follow her suggestion to require all of their suppliers to hire two stunners. (go.veg.com, www.crmcdonalds.com/publish/csr/home/report)

The differences between what PETA requested and what McDonald's implemented suggests that McDonald's changes were not a direct response of the McCruelty campaign. And although the timing between the McCruelty campaign and McDonald's guideline release *was* tight—a reason put forth by PETA for why their campaign was the biggest influence—it may possibly have been coincidental; McDonald's had established an animal welfare advisory group prior to the campaign, and the guidelines may have had been in the works since the beginning.

Regardless of the aforementioned discrepancies, it would be incorrect to downplay the impact that a campaign has on an image-conscious organization such as McDonald's. PETA's third memo, detailing talks between Gross, Langert, and Grandin in 1999, showed an unwillingness on McDonald's part to focus on improvements beyond the slaughter process:

Bob stated that "we have our hands full at this time." Steve suggested that an organization that can build four new stores a day, should, if they are committed, be able to address the two major issues of animal welfare simultaneously. Steve noted that it was hard to

believe that an organization like McDonald's could not "walk and chew gum at the same time." (goveg.com)

Despite Langert's claim that McDonald's could only focus on slaughterhouse concerns at that time, they were able to require substantial husbandry changes from their suppliers only one year later—after the McCruelty campaign. What this shows is that McDonald's *was* capable of producing change on two fronts. McDonald's statement that PETA "had absolutely nothing to do" with their guideline implementation downplays the organization's role; although it was not the underlying reason for the corporation's interest in increased welfare standards, it did serve as a pressure force, thus speeding up the process. (Wall Street Journal 2000)

Conclusion. This paper sought to assess: 1) whether pressure from PETA was primarily responsible for McDonald's animal welfare improvements, and 2) whether the interaction between the two constituted a collaborative or antagonistic relationship. The answers to the questions are "partially" and "generally still antagonistic". It should be borne in mind, however, that to deemphasize PETA's role in causing McDonald's actions is emphatically not to denigrate the strength, efficacy, or strategic positioning¹⁴ of the organization as a whole; rather, we examine the range of causal factors surrounding McDonald's epochal decision to improve farmed animal welfare standards as a mechanism for understanding how such a situation came to be, and what it portends for the future of animal advocacy's relationship to the business community.

On the question of causation: while irrefutable proof of causation lies beyond the scope of any social research, detailed analyses of the relevant context indicators points to

¹⁴ As one commentator put it, "It has been argued many times that in any social movement there has to be somebody radical enough to alienate the mainstream-and to permit more moderate influences to prevail. For every Malcolm X there is a Martin Luther King, Jr.", and so forth. (Specter 2003)

the existence of a multi-causal web that originated with the early negotiations by animal advocates, was brought to the fore by McLibel and the anti-globalization movement, reached its height during PETA's McCruelty campaign, and was substantively addressed via the conduits of animal welfare science and corporate social responsibility.

This complex set of causal factors indicates that neither PETA nor McDonald's captures the totality of what caused McDonald's to promulgate improved standards, but that both framings contain an element of the whole. On the one hand, PETA piggybacked on the vulnerability wrought by McLibel in order to claim causality and victory.¹⁵ On the other, McDonald's masked falling share prices and damage to its brand by claiming the causal primacy of CSR driven by AWS input. That the truth is somewhere in between, and that both PETA and McDonald's behaved as strategic actors to optimize their claims and position, comes as no great surprise.

On the question of how animal activists and companies interact: whereas the issue of causation turns out to be neither here nor there, the apparent activist-corporate collaboration of the goveg.com documents is belied by insights gleaned from the context indicators. However, this insight—that the animal advocacy domain is not seeing the same kind of open collaboration with business interests that is so visible in the environmental movement—should be taken with the following grain of salt: just because PETA is not behaving collaboratively, it does not mean that HSUS or other organizations are. Indeed, if Burger King's negotiations with HSUS are a good indicator, companies *are* cooperating with more moderate animal advocacy groups; the McCruelty campaign

¹⁵ This actually demonstrates PETA's adeptness at acting strategically; as PETA spokesperson Lisa Lange puts it: "as long as there's a question and studies to back it up, we'll exploit it." (Klein 2000) Or, as Bruce Friedrich more blatantly puts it, "We are attacking McDonald's because we can – it's backed up by the McLibel verdict." (Jardine 1999)

indicates that they are doing it at least in part because of the threat of an acrimonious brush with PETA.

Based on the findings from this analysis, future research should be conducted on other animal advocacy organizations' interactions with companies to further the understanding of campaigns launched by groups like PETA in their attack on corporation behavior, and to better predict the likelihood of collaboration or campaign success for differently situated animal advocacy organizations. International FAW campaigns as they relate to global corporations like McDonald's and international animal advocacy corporations also present a domain for much-needed research that has been generally beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁶

This research, finally, is significant to the future of not only animal rights, but also to campaign strategists in general; the 'McCruelty campaign' model was, and continues to be, applied to negative campaigns against many more businesses (including Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Wendy's). And while recent developments include successes in PETA's Canadian KFC campaign,¹⁷ the national and international debate over the role of businesses in safeguarding animal welfare standards is far from over.

¹⁶ See <http://www.peta.org/feat/paulmc/factsheet.html> for an example of how PETA upbraids McDonald's on the lack of voluntary international action.

¹⁷ See http://getactive.peta.org/campaign/canada_kfc_victory for details.

Appendix A

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