

MORE AWARENESS FOR MEAT AS FOOD

Interview with Hannes Royer, organic farmer and chairman of the non-profit association "Land schafft Leben".

Are you a farmer yourself?

Yes and I love being a farmer and I have an 800 year old mountain farm in Schladming. It is my parent's farm which I took over when I was 21 years old. They had dairy cows and I have converted the cowshed into rearing young cows for dairy farms.

How do you keep your animals?

I get the young cows at the age of ten to twelve weeks from different farms. They spend their childhood and youth on my farm. Most of the time I have between 70 and 80 animals, who spend the summer on the mountain pasture and the rest of the time on my farm. They are then artificially inseminated. Before they give birth to their calves, they are returned to the farm they came from. I know that they then live seven to nine years as dairy cows, which is old for a dairy cow.

What attitude do you have towards animals?

My father was always very respectful towards the animals and knew the personality of each dairy cow. Even the rooster grew to eight or nine years old on our farm. I saw how farm animals were treated well, up to the slaughter process and I was also there for the slaughtering of pigs. For me, treating animals well, using them, and finally slaughtering them as stress-free as possible, is not a contradiction.



How is being a farmer connected to animal welfare?

I am responsible for my animals, and I know many farmers that see it that way. In 2006 I converted the cowshed, not because there was funding for it, but because I found it was better for my animals. A sense of value for your own work and therefore also for your animals is very important.

Why is meat often offered cheaply?

It is the result of the "cheap is cool" mentality. Supermarkets advertise for example discount pork. People buy a kilo of pork shoulder for € 2.99 and then they go to the petrol station and buy a litre of energy drink for seven euros. We are willing to pay a lot for lifestyle products, but when it comes to an animal which was cared for daily for months, which needed food and space, nobody wants to pay for that. This puts more and more pressure on farmers. The price for meat drops, which leads to more animals having to be kept in a stable. But in the end society asks for better animal welfare and more space for animals. That's why it is so important to be mindful, in supermarkets and also restaurants, of where the meat comes from and how the animals were kept.



How high is the value of meat?

Eating meat used to be something special, but today it has sadly become something that is not valued much. You can see that with the many special offers in the supermarket. When I ask young people how much meat they eat, they often say, “No, I don’t eat that much.” But when I ask them to be more specific, a lot of meat is eaten after all: burgers, frozen pizza, meat in ready-made sauces for spaghetti or meat spreads for sandwiches, in tortellini and so on. Many don’t realise how much meat they eat. The meals don’t remind them any more of animals that have lost their lives, making it difficult to develop an awareness for their own meat consumption. Manufacturers don’t have to declare where the meat is from in convenience products. We can assume that mostly the cheapest meat is used.

What influence do consumers have on the lives of farm animals?

An enormous one. When more meat from good animal husbandry is bought, then investing in more animal welfare is not a problem. When farmers don’t have

to fight about having to offer the cheapest product. For a long time, I saw retail stores as our enemy, because the supermarket chains profit too, but they only offer what is in demand. I sometimes wonder, why we always need the latest phone or the even better car. But when it comes to our own body, what goes in has no value. On average we eat a ton of food per year. Let’s realise that our food is our fuel. So being conscious of our food is important.

What would you tell young people if you could directly speak to them now?

You are powerful beings and not at the mercy of corporations. You can change a lot with your decision to purchase. Almost everyone can afford to buy less meat, but from good animal husbandry. You can’t compare a Schnitzel, a Kebab, with a lifestyle product like an energy drink, there is so much more behind it. A vegan lifestyle can’t really change the conditions in meat production. Whoever eats meat from good animal husbandry, can influence the type of animal husbandry in the long term.

What does your association, “Land schafft Leben“, offer?

With “Land schafft Leben“ (land creates life) I wanted to start a non-profit association that is unbiased and deals with the topic of Austrian food. With our educational work we want to show the consumers how food is produced. We don’t want to advertise or portray scandals. It should offer a transparent insight. There are no taboo subjects,

we address everything. We research each food, whether it is a cucumber or pork. People can picture their food better. This raising of awareness is unique in Europe. I got the idea for “Land schafft Leben” when I opened a farm shop. I realised how little people know about the production of food. For many, the only criterion for a purchase is the low price. But if only the special offer remains, then farms in Austria have no chance of survival. But it is important that we keep producing food in this country. The corona crisis has shown how important shopping locally is for quality, animal welfare and climate.

How will farming and eating habits change in the coming 20 years?

A lot of people will shop more consciously, and the issue of animal welfare will influence purchase decisions a lot more than today. Food will be more transparent so that consumers can comprehend the journey of an animal, from birth to slaughter, for food.

Thank you for the interview!

