

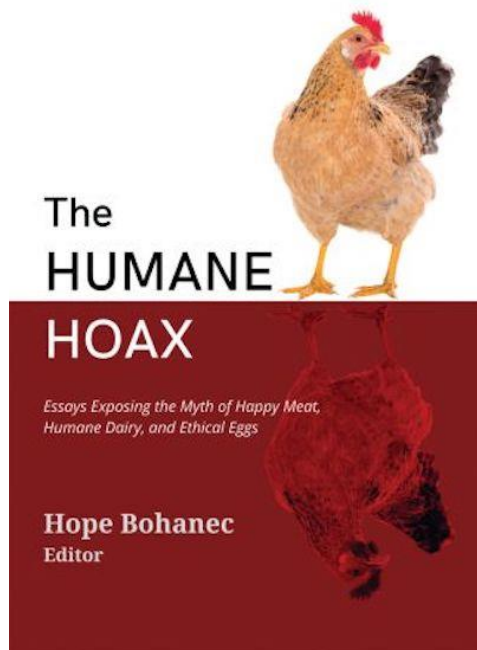
'The Humane Hoax' Asks Us to Rethink Our Meal Plans

From [Marc Bekoff, Psychology Today / Animal Emotions](#)

April 2023

A thoughtful collection of essays carefully examines the food we choose to eat.

I recently read a book called *The Humane Hoax: Essays Exposing the Myth of Happy Meat, Humane Dairy, and Ethical Eggs* edited by Hope Bohanec and it made me think and rethink about the ways in which people choose their meal plans and the amount of humane-washing and [cognitive dissonance](#) that go into justifying who we eat.¹



The essays in the book aren't an "in your face" assault but rather a collection of well-written and thoughtful pieces that call for deep reflection that might move some people out of their comfort zones. If that happens, in my humble opinion, the book has achieved one of its major [goals](#).

Here's what Hope had to say about her challenging new book.

Marc Bekoff: Why did you edit *The Humane Hoax*?

Hope Bohanec: I have been active in farmed animal protection work for over 30 years and in that time, I have witnessed a shift in the [marketing](#) of animal products. As the animal agriculture industry's cruelty and environmental impact has come more to light, industry marketing strategies have been adapting by using "humane" labels, small-scale tall tales, and other feel-good falsehoods. The term "humane hoax" is defined as the new language and labels in animal product marketing that convey a false narrative of supposed "humane" treatment and "sustainable" [management](#) of farmed animal operations. The marketing language and euphemistic labels tell a story of a supposed distinction from conventional animal products. But the reality on the ground, during the mechanical milking, and inside the terrifying slaughterhouse, is fundamentally unchanged, despite promises to consumers of something new. Humane-

washing and green-washing are becoming more prevalent and pervasive than ever, so I felt it was the right time to dig deep into the issue from varying perspectives in an anthology.²

MB: Tell us about the contributors to your book?

HB: The anthology has an impressive list of 18 contributing writers who are a diverse assortment of activists, academics, authors, and grassroots campaigners—all writing from a mixture of perspectives, issues, and subtopics. They range from radical protesters to educating advocates to professional scholars in the academy. What they all share is a forward-thinking vision and common concerns with animal agriculture's marketing shift toward humane labeling in an effort to appease and mislead customers while animals still suffer.

Among other topics, we explore how so-called alternative animal agriculture intersects with feminism, affects [the environment](#), is represented in the media, and impacts human and non-human communities alike. These trailblazing authors delve into every dark corner of the humane hoax to reveal the truth behind the labels. Some have done extensive peer-reviewed research on the subject; others have been working with farmed animal advocacy for decades thinking deeply about this issue. Still others are rescuing farmed animals directly from local and small-scale farms, witnessing firsthand the undeniable suffering that is commonplace in all animal farming.

MB: Who is your intended audience?

HB: We hope to reach consumers who are drawn to and support humane and sustainable labeling. These are compassionate people who want to do the right thing and don't want to participate in animal suffering or environmental harm. They may be foodies, vegetarians, flexitarians, food justice advocates, environmentalists, or readers who want new information about food trends. We hope to help shed light on the truth behind humane marketing and labeling so they can make informed choices.



MB: What are some of the topics you weave into your book and what are some of your major messages?

HB: There are four sections in the book covering numerous aspects of humane-washing and green-washing. Some of the authors share firsthand stories of animals that they have known and how they were harmed by small-scale farming methods and so-called humane farming operations. For example, we hear from one author who grew up on her family's pig farm and her connection to one of the pigs who the family took in as a "pet." I share my story of rescuing a severely injured and abandoned rooster who was a victim of the backyard egg-farming fad.

There is an entire section with multiple chapters dedicated to green-washing and the truth behind sustainable labels such as "local," "organic," and "grass-fed." The authors unpack the issue with peer-reviewed studies and rigorously analyzed science to show that animal farming is terribly inefficient and a negligent waste of resources even with these alternative labels and farming methods.

Other essays explore how the media portrays supposed humane and sustainable farming. Desperate for "good news" stories, journalists and media outlets love to feature farms who are offering consumers a choice of a "better" way to commodify and kill animals, but the true story of how little good these labels are truly doing for the animals and the environment goes largely untold.

Another aspect of the humane hoax that is addressed is the new do-it-yourself ethos of backyard farming, mostly keeping chickens for eggs, but also slaughtering animals for meat. People often go into these ventures with good intentions of lower ecological impact and more humane treatment, but all too often, unintentional cruelty and neglect is the result.

We hear about how roosters are often the victim of this system, being unwanted, abandoned, starving, injured, and suffering. In another essay, a theologian explores the "[spiritual](#)" language often used by backyard butchers to justify their actions and ease their [guilt](#).

MB: Are you hopeful that as people learn more about these sorts of hoaxes and myths they will demand HB: the truth from those who spread these lies?

HB: Yes, I am hopeful because as frustrating and dark as this subject is, I feel that there is hope built into the humane hoax. The whole reason these labels are popular and sell products is because people care. Consumers care and have compassion for the suffering of animals that is now being exposed in animal agriculture. They want to do something—they want to have better choices and they don't want to participate in animal exploitation or environmental harm.

But what they don't know is what we go into great detail about in the book, that the labels are a lie and animals are still suffering. Commodifying and killing animals for profit can never be humane. The only truly humane option is to eliminate animal products and animal farming and to live vegan.

References

In conversation with Hope Bohanec, executive director of Compassionate Living and the host of the *Hope for the Animals Podcast*.

1) One of the champions of humane-washing and being an apologist for industrial agriculture is [Dr. Temple Grandin](#). In a recent [essay](#), Grandin writes that she thinks it's fine to use animals who are part of the industrial agriculture complex for food as long as we give them a "low-stress, good death." This means she knows these sentient beings deeply suffer and live horrific lives while waiting to be killed from the day they're born until the time they're slaughtered but tries to argue that the cows aren't really stressed and don't know they're going to die, so all is good. In the conflict of interest disclosure Grandin

admits to doing paid consulting work on animal handling and welfare for major meat companies and restaurants.

2) About 20 years ago, I started researching for my book, *The Ultimate Betrayal: Is There Happy Meat?*, which was the first book ever written on the subject of humane-washing. This book was a response to my observation that the industry was shifting towards humane labeling and greenwashing in marketing and on animal products. I felt the need for an animal-focused response to this marketing trend, so I engaged in extensive research—including multiple on-site investigations, interviews with those who have first-hand experience with the industry, and I even met animals who were victims of so-called “humane” farming to tell their stories. [The Humane Hoax Project](#) was born from this work.

- [Vegan Entanglements: The Far-Reaching Webs of Speciesism](#)
- [The Vegan Evolution: Transforming Diets and Agriculture](#)
- [The Broad Relevance of Vegan Ethics in Everyday Life](#)
- [As Food Animals Became "Things," Their Feelings Were Ignored](#)
- [Will the Future of Food Be a World Without Meat](#)
- [Why Is Eating Meat So Emotionally and Ethically Challenging?](#)
- [Is Dairy Farming Cruel to Bright and Emotional Cows?](#)
- [The Mistreatment of Female "Food Cows" Includes Sexual Abuse](#)
- [Cows: Science Shows They're Bright and Emotional Individuals](#)
- [Pigs Are Intelligent, Emotional, and Cognitively Complex](#)
- [The World According to Intelligent and Emotional Chickens](#)
- [Assuming Chickens Suffer Less Than Pigs Is Idle Speciesism](#)
- [Empathic chickens and cooperative elephants: Emotional intelligence expands its range again](#)
- [Chickens and Badgers: Smart Beyond Our Wildest Imagination](#)
- [Thinking chickens: a review of cognition, emotion, and behavior in the domestic chicken.](#)
- [Rooster falls in love with special needs chicken.](#)
- [Learning to Love Backyard Chickens.](#)
- [The Emotional Lives and Personalities of Backyard Chickens.](#)
- Kristof, Nicholas. [What a Girl's Goat Teaches Us About Our Food](#). The New York Times, April 15, 2023.
- [United Poultry Concerns](#): Promoting the Compassionate and Respectful Treatment of Domestic Fowl