

Mad Cows and Ministers: The Evolution of the UK Beef Crisis

Dr Linda Hadfield
Greenscape Consultancy,
Sindora,
Bedford Rd,
Turvey,
Bedford
MK43 8BE
England

Tel: +44 (0) 1234 881442

Mad Cows and Ministers: The Evolution of the UK Beef Crisis

Abstract

Within complex modern societies, changes which occur in natural systems, the physical context, or “environment”, do not exist in isolation, but in complex, co-evolutionary relationships with other change processes, in human knowledge, perception, institutions and behaviour. Changes in practices and procedures relating to the exploitation or management of natural processes may have emergent effects which lead to unanticipated and undesirable outcomes for individuals or groups. These outcomes may be unpredictable in terms of the current state of scientific knowledge, and, once recognised, may be uncertain and controversial. Changing recognition of the existence of such outcomes and increased understanding of the underlying causal relationships may lead to the construction of an “issue” or “problem” around the outcomes, and to calls for a response to rectify, reduce or prevent the effects. However, the complexity of the contributing causal chains and the presence of multiple interests mean that such responses are seldom straightforward and uncontroversial.

The sequence of events leading to, and attempts to manage, the issue of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and its suggested links with new variant Creutzfeld-Jakob’s disease in humans, can be seen as an example of just such an issue. Using a conceptual model of linked processes of change based on a soft complex systems approach, and contemporary accounts drawn from the national press, the present paper will investigate the ways in which a scientific issue of inherent uncertainty is intimately linked with processes of perceptual and policy change.

Presented at the Fourth International Interdisciplinary Conference on the Environment, Interdisciplinary Environmental Association, Washington DC, July 10th, 1998

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.