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Animal ethics and animal welfare in school education: case studies from Italy

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The discourse around food is growing everywhere, including school. Here, food education is mainly focused on the nutritional aspects and on the environmental impacts of food choices. Little attention is given to animal ethics and animal welfare issues. If we fully recognize the power of school education in forming food-competent, healthy, and happy children who retain those attributes as adults, in a process in which the whole person is nourished, then we must assume that the animal question needs to be addressed in school. To contribute to the debate on whether and how schools should deal with this topic, the authors discuss the first results of an exploratory study both on young people’s relationships with animals, and particularly with livestock, and the opportunities for education. Using different qualitative research methods (focus group discussions, interviews, solicited drawings or written texts), the authors obtained insights on the perception of several groups of persons involved in the education system: students of different age, teachers, and parents. Then, the authors examined some cases of education portraying approaches, narratives, and ways they cope with contradictory ethical and emotional experiences. The conclusions help in shedding light on the complex education process through which young people learn to treat (and even eat) the animals known as livestock.