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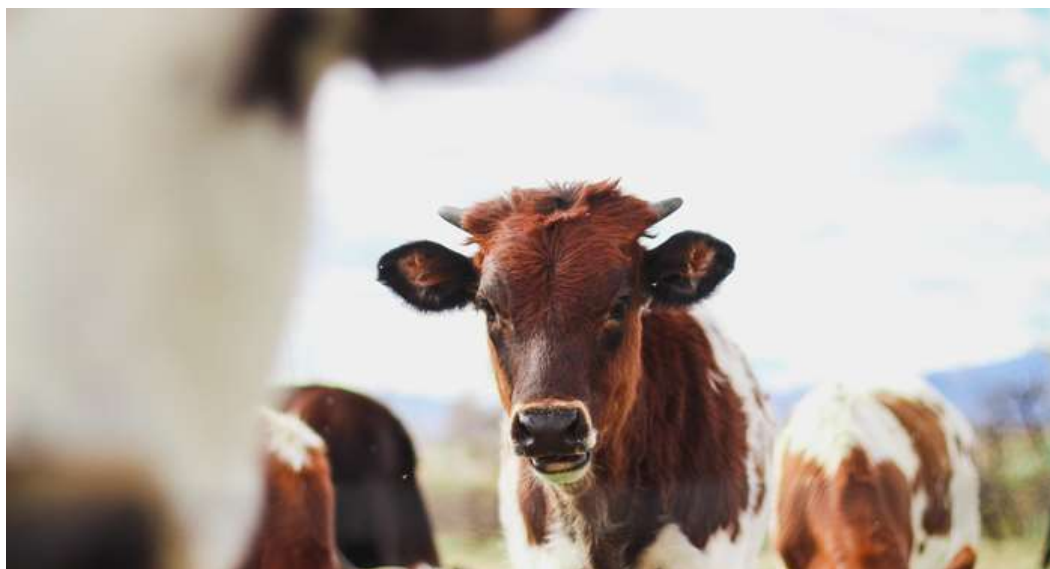
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# Exploring the Secret Life of Cows (and Other Animals Our Culture Eats)

Think that farm animals aren't sentient and don't have rich inner lives? Here's why it's time for you to reconsider.

BY [DIANA BAND](#) / JUNE 29, 2018



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When my husband and I left New York and moved across the country, we made the trip with our animals: two cats and bunny nestled in the backseat of our yellow Subaru. The trip was surprisingly easy for all of us, especially considering that half of us had hardly traveled further than the vet's office. But that changed the day our route took us through the feedlots of Amarillo, Texas.

Though I had seen plenty of disturbing images from factory farms, I'd never experienced one firsthand. I will never forget the sight of those cows — thousands of them crammed together outside of a massive

slaughterhouse, standing on hills of their own waste, packed in so tightly they could hardly move. At a distance, I had mistaken these animals for crushed cars — I thought we were approaching some strange, enormous junkyard. And if this weren't horrific enough, the smell of blood and waste was overpowering — so much so that our bunny scrambled at his blankets and our cats cried with fear. For the first time on the trip, I was enormously grateful for my husband's lead foot.

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I would like to think that this sight would be a life-changing experience for all, but as evidenced by the signs for steakhouses not that far down the road, I know that our culture's disconnect regarding the sentience of animals we eat versus the animals we don't is enormous. Year after year, I watch as carnivores speak out against the Yulin Dog Meat Festival, seemingly unaware that cows, pigs, sheep, and chickens are subjected to the same appalling treatment and conditions right here at home. I know that this is maddening for many non-carnivores, but I think I understand why it happens. After all, don't many of us spend our lives being told that farm animals are dumb? And really, how many of us have spent as much time bonding with cows (or pigs, or chickens) as we have with dogs? It's easy to dismiss the feelings of any living creature with whom we've not cultivated a personal bond.



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Rosamund Young, a second generation organic farmer at Kite's Nest Farm in Worcestershire, England, has spent decades watching her cows roam free, making decisions on rearing, grazing, and housing, exhibiting the quirks and predilections that any pet owner has observed in their own companion animals. She recounts many a heart-warming tale about her family's cows (and sheep, hens, and pigs) in her new book, *The Secret Life of Cows*, which offers a compelling argument for treating all animals well and preserving their dignity, whether we eat them or not.

Food — and our relationship to it — can be very complicated. There are economic, cultural, and emotional factors involved, which is why I try not to impress upon others what I think they should eat. Instead, I ask anyone who consumes animals and animal products to consider the life of the animal. Much of our meat at the grocery store, at fast food chains

and restaurants, spends its brief life in conditions exactly like those I witnessed in Amarillo. That is an undignified, unhappy way to live one's life, to say the very least.

Every day, new studies reveal the "secret lives" of all kinds of animals, so it stands to reason that all species possess them — it's simply that our culture asks us to consider the sentience of some, and not others. After all, if elephants grieve and dolphins form complex social hierarchies, why wouldn't all living creatures possess feelings and intelligence?

Young offers a window into an animal world that we don't always consider — or have access to. Approach *The Secret Life of Cows* with an open mind, and an open heart — and see if it pushes you to seek out your own firsthand experiences. If more of us are able to cultivate personal experiences with these animals, perhaps more of us would eat them less — or at the very least, concern ourselves more with their welfare.

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