Animal Machines examined farming practices and expressed concern that the intensive methods were ‘unnatural’ and could potentially cause ill-health and suffering in animals and compromise food safety.

In her book Harrison stated, “Life in the factory farm revolves entirely around profits, and animals are assessed purely for their ability to convert food into flesh for ‘saleable products.’” The publication of Animal Machines stirred sufficient uproar that British citizens protested in the streets of London.

In 1965, the British government created the Brambell Commission to address the concerns raised by Harrison’s book. The Commission included farmers, animal behaviorists, veterinarians, animal protectionists, and regulatory officials. Scientific research was identified as an important part of the process to help decide whether specific conditions were safe and humane for animals. The Commission issued a technical report that presented the conceptual framework of the Five Freedoms. After further refinement by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, the Five Freedoms continue to exist as an assessment paradigm for animal welfare to this day (Freedom from Hunger and Thirst; Freedom from Thermal and Physical Discomfort; Freedom from Pain, Injury, and Disease; Freedom to Express Normal Behavior; and Freedom from Fear and Distress).

Source:

Following the Commission’s publication, research was done to look at how animals in the wild behaved, the effect of farming systems on health and growth, the effect of cage designs on the brain and behavior of rodents, and the effect of noxious stimuli on physiological stress responses. There followed a period of reanalysis and integration such that multiple measures of the animals’ overall state would be used to determine the overall effects of common housing and husbandry methods.

During the 1980s, it became acceptable within the mainstream of the scientific community to consider the internal subjective state of the animal. There was interest in not only how the animal perceived pain, but also in exploring more subtle emotions and cognitions such as discomfort, boredom, optimism, and self-awareness.

Since these initial scientific breakthroughs in animal welfare, the field has continued to expand as a multi-disciplinary endeavor, including into the associated ethical and philosophical frameworks and into regulatory and decision-making models. Discoveries relating to practices such as analgesia, humane endpoints, and environmental enrichment that were at first tentative have been replicated, leading to suggested best practices that are increasingly mandated as part of good animal care.