

FINAL RULING

Eden Farmed Animal Sanctuary t/a Go
Vegan World
Chamberstown House
Slane
Co Meath
Ireland

Case number: A17-381845

Media: National press

Sector: Non-commercial

Agency: None

Number of complaints : 7

Ad

A newspaper ad for Go Vegan World, a vegan campaign group, seen in the national press in February 2017, featured a photo of a cow behind a piece of barbed wire. The headline text stated “Humane milk is a myth. Don’t buy it”. Smaller text stated “I went vegan the day I visited a dairy. The mothers, still bloody from birth, searched and called frantically for their babies. Their daughters, fresh from their mothers’ wombs but separated from them, trembled and cried piteously, drinking milk from rubber teats on the wall instead of their mothers’ nurturing bodies. All because humans take their milk. Their sons are slaughtered for their flesh and they themselves are slaughtered at 6 years. Their natural lifespan is 25 years. I could no longer participate in that. Can you?”

Issue

Seven complainants, some of whom had experience working in the dairy industry, and who believed that the ad did not accurately describe the way that dairy cattle were generally treated in the UK, challenged whether the claim “Humane milk is a myth” and the accompanying claims “The mothers, still bloody from birth” and “their daughters, fresh from their mothers’ wombs but separated from them” were misleading and could be substantiated.

Response

Go Vegan World said that the phrase “still bloody from birth” was simply an indication that the cow was a new mother. They said that mammals, including cows, were bloody from birth for more than two weeks post-delivery. They provided several papers that referred to this occurring in dairy cows.

Go Vegan World believed that the phrase “fresh from their mothers’ wombs” would be commonly understood as applying to a very young infant or neonate. They said that in the dairy industry, the neonatal period was commonly defined as being from delivery until 28 days of life. During this time, calves were particularly vulnerable to illnesses and in need of their mother’s care. They said that “fresh” was a term commonly used in the dairy industry to refer to calves, or to cows that had recently given birth. They said that “fresh” period lasted for at least two weeks after birth and provided examples of articles that used this terminology.

Go Vegan World said that the ad did not state or imply that calves were separated from their mothers prior to the 12-24 hours recommended by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). In any case, they believed that the exact timing of the

separation was irrelevant to the ad, which commented on the injustice of separating mother and child. They said that later separation actually caused more distress and provided a paper that referred to problems experienced by cows around the time of calving. They believed that most people would consider separation at 25 hours as unjust as separation at 24 hours.

Go Vegan World believed that consumers would understand the claims to mean that calves were separated from their mothers at a very early stage in the mother-child relationship, and not specifically prior to 12-24 hours after birth. Although they believed the message to be sufficiently clear, they said they would be willing to include a statement in future ads saying that calves were generally separated from their mothers 12-24 hours after birth.

Assessment

Not upheld

The ASA understood the complainants were concerned that the claim “Humane milk is a myth”, in conjunction with the specific claims “their mothers still bloody from birth” and “fresh from their mothers’ wombs”, implied that a significant number of dairy farms did not comply with animal welfare standards that were in place in the UK, and that milk production was therefore “inhumane” in that sense.

However, we considered that readers, who were unlikely to have specialist knowledge of the dairy industry, would understand the claim “their daughters, fresh from their mothers’ wombs, but separated from them” to mean that calves were generally separated from their mothers very soon after being born rather than a comment on compliance with any specific welfare standards. The ad did not specify the precise period of time after birth at which the separation would take place, but given the impression of immediacy given by “fresh from their mothers’ wombs” and “still bloody from birth”, we considered that readers would understand that calves were removed from their mothers in the period immediately following birth or very soon after. It was clear that the ad was for a vegan pressure group, and we considered that consumers would understand that the language used reflected the group’s opinion about the use of animals in the production of food more generally, and reflected their known beliefs and perspective on the dairy industry.

We understood that Defra recommended that calves should be kept with their mothers for at least 12 and preferably 24 hours after birth. Although the language used to express the claims was emotional and hard-hitting, we understood it was the case that calves were generally separated from their mothers very soon after birth, and we therefore concluded that the ad was unlikely to materially mislead readers.

We investigated the ad under CAP Code (Edition 12) rules 3.1 (Misleading advertising) and 3.7 (Substantiation) but did not find it in breach.

Action

No further action required.

