

AGRICULTURAL FAIRS: THE TENSION BETWEEN SPECTACLE AND THE ETHICS OF CARE*



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Introduction:

Despite widespread recognition of animal sentience, routine agricultural practices may normalize conditions that obscure animal suffering. Agricultural fairs, key events in livestock production, function not only as showcases of genetic excellence but also as arenas where producers reinforce social status, while exposing animals to several concerning conditions. This research is an invitation to reflect upon the tension between exhibition (or 'spectacle') and the ethics of animal welfare at agricultural fairs.

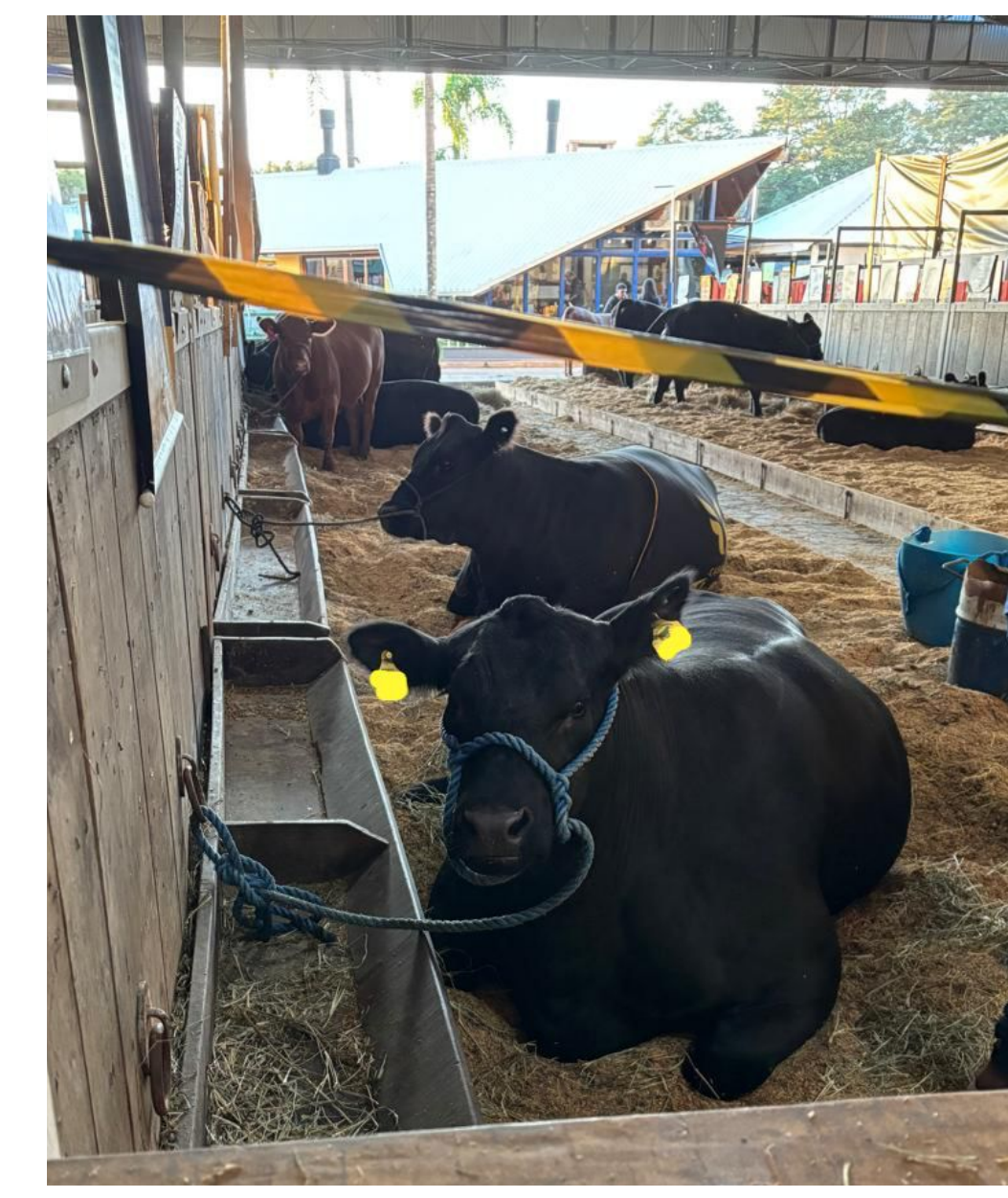
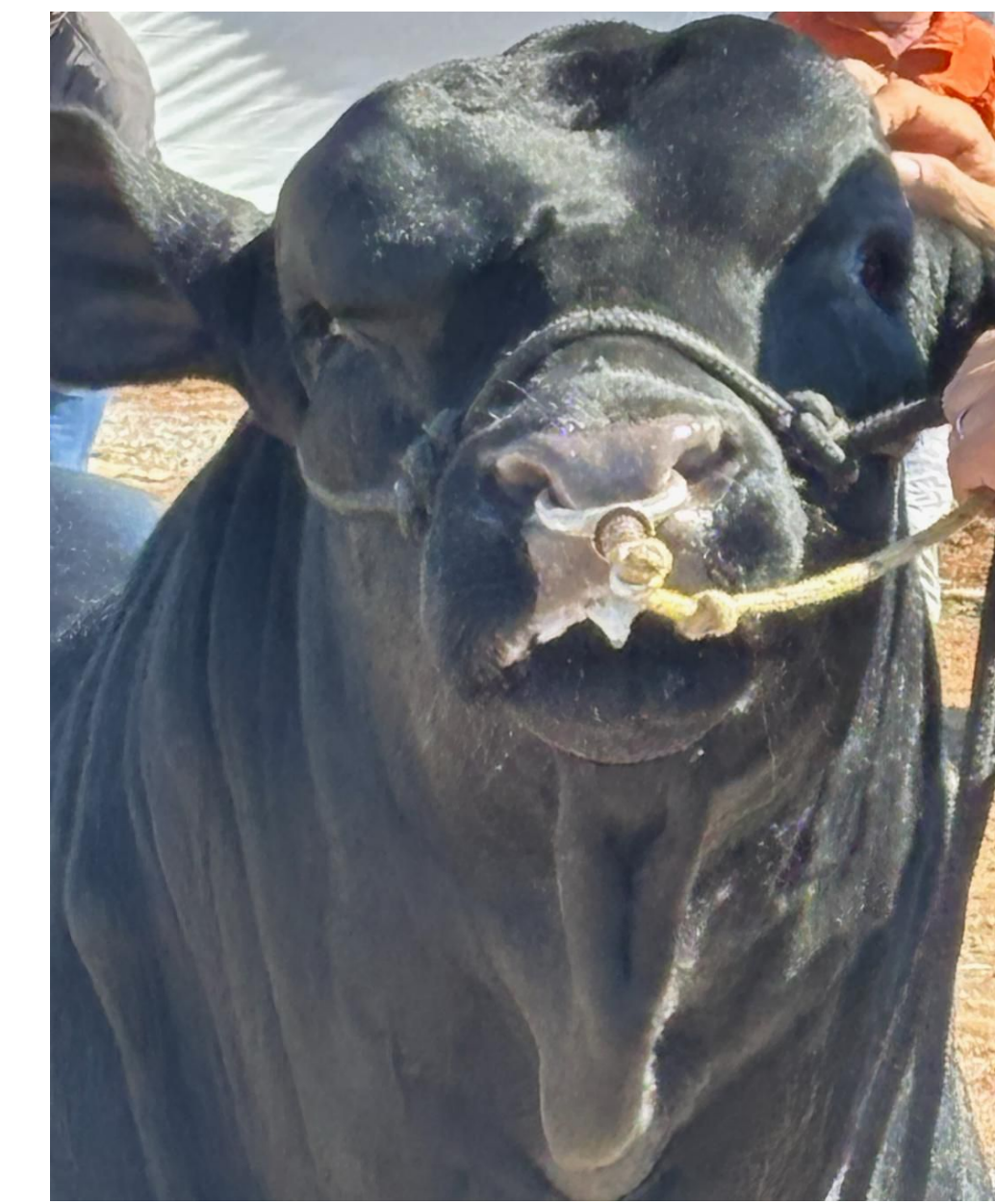
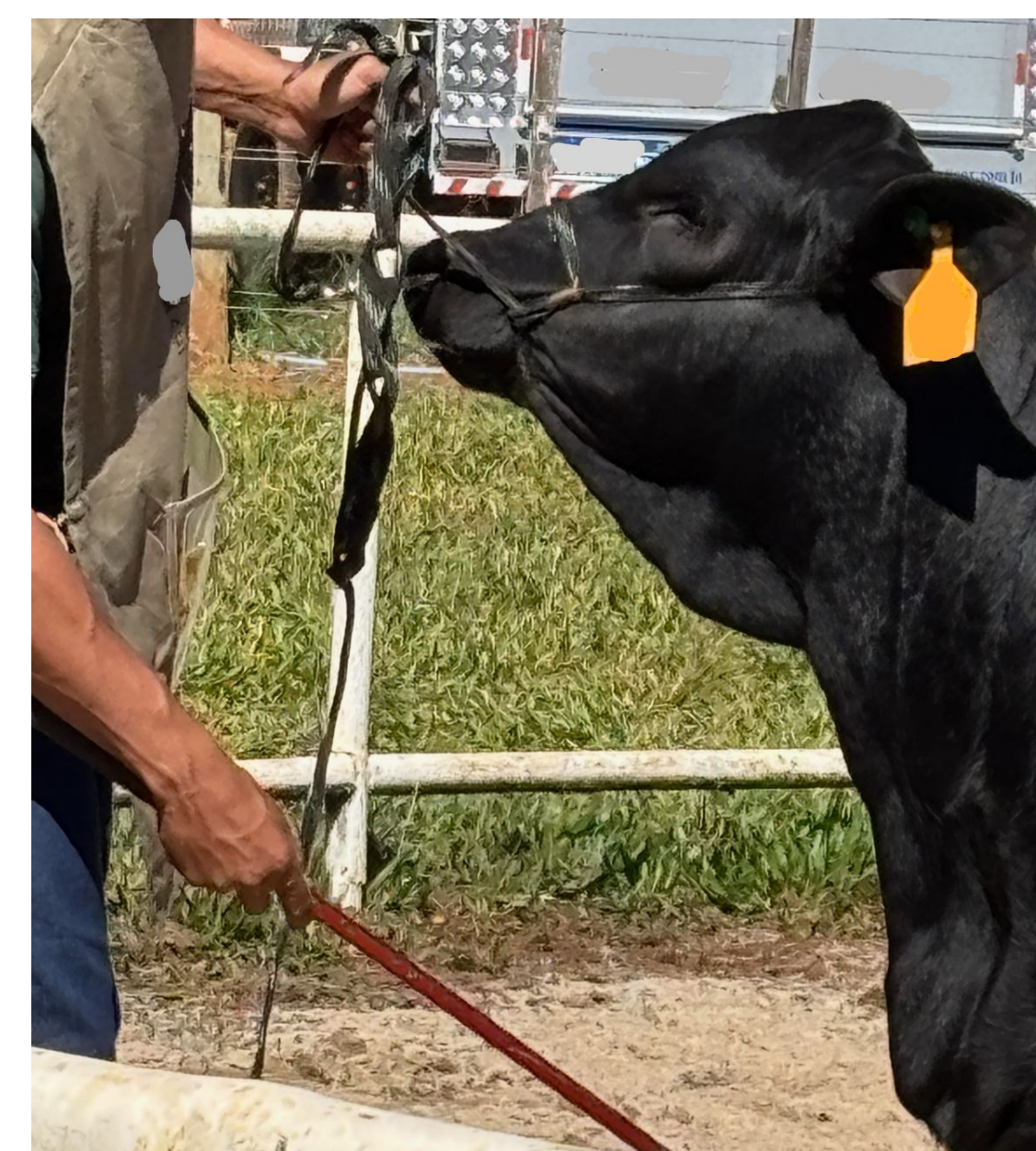
Key findings

Animals exhibited at agricultural fairs are commonly subjected to conditions as physical restraint with limited freedom of movement, controlled access to feed and water, and exposure to thermal stress. The constant circulation of unfamiliar people—often invading the animals' flight distance—combined with loud music, intense noise, strong odors, and unpredictable stimuli, can activate acute stress responses and, when prolonged, may negatively affect behavioral expression, physiological stability, and overall welfare status.

Also, specific practices commonly observed in these settings such as the use of nose rings for control, and the striking ('slap') used to identify the winning animal during judging events illustrate a complex blend of total control and performative dominance.

Methods

Ethnographic fieldwork conducted during visits to various agricultural fairs in Southern Brazil and Colombia.



Maria Crstina Yunes- XVIII Expocampos and 48ª Expointer - 2025, Brazil

Considerations

- Agricultural fairs emerge as socio-cultural spaces where embodied human authority and spectacle are normalized at the expense of animal welfare. In these contexts, physical discomfort is frequently normalized for the sake of presenting docility and affirming human control over the animal.
- An ethics of situated care requires dismantling practices of domination that normalize physical control and environmental stress, reducing animals to "status objects" or sentient commodities. It is proposed that the fair become a space for relationality, where the agency and vulnerability of cattle are recognized, prioritizing their individual integrity and dignity over economic valuation, productive performance, and competitive tradition.

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