In recent years farm animal issues have become increasingly politicised. Consumer concern for farm animal welfare has increased, and there has been a growing demand for alternative livestock products. Organic animal farming has been an important alternative livestock production scheme that has attempted to respond to these growing farm animal welfare concerns. In this research I investigate how the meanings of farm animal welfare are constructed in the discourses of the Finnish Association for Organic Farming (FAOF). FAOF is a national umbrella organisation for societies operating in the organic sector. It is a central player in the societal discussion concerning organic farming and represents organic farmers in public discussion and the policy making arena.

This research participates in the discussion of human-animal studies concerning the social meanings of farm animals and the politicisation of animal issues. My aim is to increase understanding concerning the meanings of animal welfare in alternative livestock systems, which have been hitherto subjected to minimal analysis in the sociology of human-animal relations. The most important sources include Adrian Franklin's, Arnold Arluke's and Clinton R. Sander's writings. In addition, I aim to contribute to discussions in organic farming studies concerning the expansion and "conventionalisation" of organic farming as well as the growing business and governmental involvement in the organic sector. The most important sources include Julie Guthman's, Magnus Boström's and Mikael Klintman's writings.

I study the meanings of farm animal welfare in FAOF's texts from the theoretical perspective of social constructionism. The data consist of 268 Luomulehti articles, FAOF's documents as well as interviews with five FAOF's representatives and activists. The methodological approach is based on discourse analysis, and I have analysed the data by coding it according to different themes with NVivo software.

I argue that there are three main discourses concerning the meanings of animal welfare in organic farming in FAOF's texts: an ideological discourse, a market-oriented discourse and an animal welfare business discourse. In the ideological discourse, organic livestock production is portrayed to be a value-based choice, and stringent animal welfare standards are supported with moral arguments. In the market-oriented discourse, organic livestock production is represented as an economic choice. Organic farming is represented as a respectable and rational form of farming and a certain distance is taken from any kind of "organic ideologism" or "religiousity". This discourse includes a negative attitude toward stringent animal welfare standards on economic grounds. In the animal welfare business discourse, an attempt is made to reconcile the tensions between the ideological discourse and the market-oriented discourse. As in the ideological discourse, high animal welfare standards are supported, but not with moral arguments, but with economic arguments like in the market-oriented discourse.

My main thesis is that ideological argumentation has become weaker in FAOF's discourses while market-based argumentation has increased its foothold. This is related to a wider trend of expansion, institutionalisation and "normalisation" in organic farming. As the sector has expanded, it has contained an increasing amount of players who do not share the original ideologies of the organic movement. These actors are approached in a conventional way in FAOF by focusing on the issues of profitability and economics. At the same time FAOF has been increasingly profiled as an interest group for organic farmers rather than an ideological organisation representing a social movement. In this way, FAOF has responded to the growth in the number of market-oriented organic farmers in the organic sector and in its membership generally. In addition, as FAOF has started increasingly discussing standards in the governmental arena, rather than developing its own private standard, it has needed to translate ideology into the language of civil servants and politicians – i.e. into the language of money.