

Animal Welfare Evolution

The past 40 to 50 years has seen profound changes in attitudes toward animals, especially in Europe and North America, to the point that practices that seemed modern and progressive just a few decades ago are now being questioned and criticized and in some cases replaced. This has led to a number of initiatives that try to provide assurances to the public about farm animal welfare. For example:

- In 1958, the Humane Slaughter Act was passed in the US, with President Eisenhower indicating his surprise at the strength of public support for this legislation.
- In 1964, humane trucking regulations were created in Canada.
- In 1968, Welfare Codes of best practices were authorized by an act in the UK.
- In 1981, the battery cage was banned in Switzerland after a referendum.
- Around 1990, several European Union Directives were issued on production of eggs, pigs and veal calves.
- 1994 saw the start of the Freedom Food labeling program in the UK which labels food products that are produced according to certain animal welfare standards.
- In 1999 McDonald's Restaurants in the USA began requiring certain animal welfare standards as a condition of purchase from its US suppliers. This particular initiative now involves 40 chain restaurant companies who are members of the National Council of Chain Restaurants as well as the 2,300 members of the Food Marketing Institute.

One of the more significant indications of concern about animal welfare was the recent (2005) addition of welfare guidelines to the international Animal Health Code by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). With 167 member countries, the primary role of the OIE is to monitor the global animal disease and zoonosis situation and to provide leadership in the control of these diseases. In 2001, a new mandate was added to the organization's objectives: "To provide a better guarantee of the safety of food of animal origin and to promote animal welfare through a science-based approach."

To implement the new mandate, the OIE established guiding principles on which to base animal welfare standards for transportation, humane slaughter and killing for disease control purposes. The guiding principles are listed in the box below. Standards are described in Appendix 3.7 of the Animal Health Code which can be found at:

www.oie.int/eng/normes/mcode/en_titre_3.7.htm

sources: David Fraser, IDF World Dairy Summit, 2005;
http://www.oie.int/eng/bien_etre/en_introduction.htm

OIE Guiding Principles for Animal Welfare

- ✓ That there is a critical relationship between animal health and animal welfare.
- ✓ That the internationally recognised 'five freedoms' (freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition; freedom from fear and distress; freedom from physical and thermal discomfort; freedom from pain, injury and disease; and freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour) provide valuable guidance in animal welfare.
- ✓ That the internationally recognised 'three Rs' (reduction in numbers of animals, refinement of experimental methods and replacement of animals with non-animal techniques) provide valuable guidance for the use of animals in science.
- ✓ That the scientific assessment of animal welfare involves diverse elements which need to be considered together, and that selecting and weighing these elements often involves value-based assumptions which should be made as explicit as possible.
- ✓ That the use of animals in agriculture and science, and for companionship, recreation and entertainment, makes a major contribution to the well-being of people.
- ✓ That the use of animals carries with it an ethical responsibility to ensure their welfare to the greatest extent practicable.
- ✓ That improvements in farm animal welfare can often improve productivity and food safety, and hence lead to economic benefits.
- ✓ That equivalent outcomes, rather than identical systems, be the basis for comparison of animal welfare standards and guidelines.