

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) Annual Reviews

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) is an independent advisory body established by the Government in 1979. Its terms of reference are to keep under review the welfare of farm animals on agricultural land, at market, in transit and at the place of slaughter; and to advise the Government of any legislative or other changes that may be necessary. In this section we set out details from the body's last two annual reviews.

Farm Animal Welfare Council Annual Review 2008/09 (July 2009)

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) Annual Review 2008/2009 reviews its work over the last period and summarises each of the reports, advices and opinions prepared in 2008 and 2009 the findings of which are summarized below:

a. **Report on the Implications of Castration and Tail Docking for the Welfare of Lambs.** This report notes that while the pain and distress caused by tail-docking is less severe than that following castration, it remains a *painful mutilation that should only be carried out with pain relief once practical methods of delivering local anaesthetics and analgesics have been developed.* The report recommends that sheep farmers, the meat industry, operators of farm assurance schemes and

retailers implement the Welfare Code, which requires careful consideration of the need for castration and tail-docking and that they introduce measures to avoid these mutilations. It also suggests that retailers and other elements of the food supply chain *should not require castration of lambs* and should reward farmers for adopting a welfare-oriented policy on castration and tail-docking.

b. **Advice on the Welfare of Pigs.** FAWC provided this advice in response to a request from the Secretary for Rural Affairs in the Scottish government. It compares British welfare standards for pigs with those of other countries that export to Britain. It highlights issues such as the UK's ban on close confinement in individual stalls for non-lactating sows and the wide coverage of domestic pig production by farm assurance schemes which have an increased inspection requirement and do not permit castration. The advice indicates that Great Britain has a higher proportion of extensive production systems than exist in other European and non-European countries and approximately 40% of its sows are managed in outdoor systems. The advice ultimately concluded that *the majority of pigs in Great Britain are kept to a higher welfare standard than those raised elsewhere in the European Union (EU).*

c. **Opinion on the Welfare of Farmed Gamebirds.** This opinion notes that approximately 40 million gamebirds (including 30-35 million pheasants and 5-10 million partridges) are reared and released each year in Great Britain. It *identifies a number of welfare issues* in relation to this, namely, the extent and duration of confinement of semi-wild species in systems offering a barren, restricting environment, use of management devices such as bits, spectacles and brailles, record-keeping, training, flock health and welfare and planning and development of best practice. The opinion recommends the adoption of flock health and welfare plans prepared in conjunction with a veterinary surgeon, ending the use of spectacles and closer control of other management devices, phasing out of barren cages and research into other accommodation, and further research into the adaptive and support needs of birds when released.

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d. **Opinion on Policy Instruments for Protecting and Improving Farm Animal Welfare.** This opinion stresses the valuable role of policy instruments in protecting animals from unacceptable treatment and from cruelty. It recommends that consideration be given to *a labelling system to enable concerned consumers to make informed choices.*

Farm Animal Welfare Council Annual Review 2009/2010

The FAWC Annual Review for 2009-2010 sets out the Reports and Opinions provided by the body over the year and produced in summary below.

Report on the Welfare of Farmed Livestock at Slaughter or Killing – Part Two: White Meat Animals.

This Report, published in May 2009 considers the welfare of poultry (and other white meat species) in the last few hours of their lives up to the moment of slaughter or killing. The Report sets out six principles for the humane slaughter and killing of white meat species, namely:

- i. All personnel involved with slaughter or killing must be trained, competent and caring;

- ii. Only those animals that are fit should be caught, loaded and transported to the slaughterhouse;
- iii. Any handling of animals prior to slaughter must be done with consideration for the animal's welfare;
- iv. In the slaughterhouse, only equipment that is fit for the purpose must be used;
- v. Prior to slaughter or killing of an animal, either it must be rendered unconscious and insensible to pain instantaneously, or unconsciousness must be induced without pain or distress; and
- vi. Animals must not recover consciousness before death ensues.

Report on Farm Animal Welfare in Great Britain: Past, Present and Future'

Described as a 'landmark' Report, the FAWC examines the effectiveness of British policy on farm animal welfare since the Brambell Report in 1965 and sets out a strategy for improvements in welfare over the next 20 years. The report suggests that farmers and policy makers should strive to ensure that 'every animal has a life worth living.' Key parts of the Report are set out in more detail below.

Opinion on the Welfare of the Dairy Cow - October 2009. The Opinion reviews the welfare of the dairy cow since FAWC's previous report in 1997. It highlights that economic pressures on the industry have over the past decade have forced farmers to seek greater

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efficiencies, which some believe have compromised the cow's welfare. The Opinion of the FAWC is that the welfare of dairy cows has not improved significantly over the past decade and further critical issues about the welfare of dairy cows need to be addressed.

Beak trimming of laying hens

The FAWC updated its advice on beak trimming of laying hens, advising that efforts should be made to end routine beak trimming in Great Britain as soon as possible. However, it concludes that, until it can be demonstrated reliably under commercial conditions that laying hens can be managed without beak trimming and without greater risk to their welfare from feather pecking and cannibalism, the ban on beak trimming should not be introduced on its original date in December 2010.

FAWC report: ‘Farm Animal Welfare in Great Britain: Past, Present and Future’ (October 2009)

In October 2009 the FAWC published a report entitled ‘*Farm Animal Welfare in Great Britain: Past, Present and Future*’ (‘the Report’). The Report reviews the effectiveness of British policy on farm animal welfare since 1965, explores the ethical principles underpinning farm animal welfare and suggests a strategy that will lead to improvements in welfare over the next 20 years.

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The ultimate recommendation of the Report is that the current focus of policy should move beyond the absence of cruelty and unnecessary suffering and the duty to provide for the animal's needs and towards ensuring an acceptable quality of life over an animal's entire lifetime.

The FAWC also recommends that welfare surveillance be undertaken regularly by government and the farming industry in a manner that emphasises welfare.

It notes that many market mechanisms which would allow the concerned consumer to make an informed choice about food and other products from livestock is mostly unrealised due to the lack of education about food and farming, impartial information about farm animal welfare and verification of marketing claims about welfare standards above the legal minimum.

The Report starts by reviewing developments in farming since the Brambell report of 1965 which led to the enactment of legislation for the protection of farm animals, codes of recommendations for the welfare of livestock, advances in the science of animal welfare and greater emphasis on welfare in the training. The Report identifies in particular the following developments:

- a. The widespread availability of safe and cheap food in response to government calls for this since the 1950s. FAWC observes that this has often been achieved by adherence to unacceptable standards of farm animal welfare;
- b. Increased domestic production of milk, beef, lamb and chicken meat, though demand outstrips supply in relation to all commodities, with shortfalls being made up by imports, this

leading to a concern about global food security;

- c. Significant changes in farming business structure from one based on the small farm model to one presently dominated by the large, vertically integrated farming company employing intensive production methods for pigs and poultry;
- d. A transfer of economic power from producers to consumers driven by reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the growth of supermarkets.

FAWC's philosophy of approach

The Report considers the **ethical principles** underpinning its approach. In considering precisely what provisions should be made by

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those who use farm animals in order to prevent them from being subjected to unnecessary suffering, the FAWC indicates that it is guided by the Five Freedoms (implicit in the Bramwell report), namely (i) freedom from hunger and thirst, (ii) freedom from discomfort, (iii) freedom from pain, injury and disease, (iv) freedom to express normal behaviour and (v) freedom from fear and distress.

The FAWC observes that while the Five Freedoms focus on poor welfare and suffering they should also aspire to provide good welfare. This entails all who are responsible for the supervision and care of farm animals to not cause unnecessary suffering and to provide for an animal's needs and some of its wants. The Report notes that good welfare is consonant with the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which imposes a duty on a person responsible for an animal to ensure welfare by taking "*such steps as are reasonable...to ensure that the needs of an animal...are met to the extent required by good practice.*"

In this Report, FAWC also states that despite its position on welfare, it is *opposed to the use of genetic modifications* in order to "breed out pain," as such. In relation to this, the Report includes an example of using modern biotechnology to produce a pig unable to feel pain and unresponsive to other pigs. FAWC argues that while the application of science offers many opportunities to improve animal welfare, it does not favour the use of animal breeding practices and technologies, including genetic modifications that would decrease the sentience of farm animals.

National regulations relating to farm animals

In its Report, the FAWC reasons that the fact that economic pressures on farmers may lead to unacceptable standards of farm animal welfare suggests that there is a need for government regulation in relation to the latter.

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It observes that legislation protecting the welfare of farm animals has evolved over the past century commencing with the *Protection of Animals Act 1911* which was followed by the *Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968* and similar legislation in Scotland. The 1968 Act made it an offence to cause or permit livestock on agricultural land to suffer unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress. The principles underpinning this Act (and indeed some of its specific provisions) have been incorporated into the *Animal Welfare Act 2006* and extended to all kept animals.

Ethical Principles for the Humane Treatment of Farm Animals

The Report notes that there are three scientific approaches to understanding animal welfare; the first emphasizing the importance of how an animal feels, the second on biological functions in which an animal's fitness is assessed by productivity indices such as growth, the third imbuing a concern that animals be kept in environments within which their species have evolved. FAWC believes that all three approaches are relevant to an animal's quality of life.

In attempting to establish a minimum standard of acceptable treatment of farm animals, FAWC argues that as farm animals are, by definition, a product of domestication, humans owe a greater duty to them in view of our use of them for food, clothing and other purposes, than to animals in the wild. FAWC believes that this does not only apply to

farmers but to all who benefit from farming animals including retailers and the great majority of consumers.

Building upon these considerations the FAWC suggests that as a minimum, each farm animal should have 'a life worth living.' This incorporates concern with respect to both the animal's physiological and mental needs and should also extend to the manner of an animal's death. This minimum should apply uniformly to all farm animals regardless of their species or husbandry.

The FAWC argues that full compliance with the law should lead to an animal having a life worth living, which in turn suggests that the law should provide effective mechanisms for achieving this. Such mechanisms should include regular assessments which count both the positive and negative experiences of the animal from its birth to its death.

In determining whether an animal has had a life that is not worth living, FAWC suggests examination of factors such as whether the system or practice induces severe negative mental states, frustrates normal behaviour, precludes positive experiences or causes physical debilitation and whether the system fails to meet the physiological and mental needs of the animal.

Further, FAWC suggests that classifications of an animal's quality of life should be reflected in the labeling of products with livestock

provenance. It argues that products which have been produced in accordance with basic legal standards need not be labelled but that those derived from animals that have had a good life should be so identified.

Current Policies and their Implementation

In examining the Government's policies on farm animal welfare and their implementation, the Report points to evidence that the delivery of animal welfare policy is too complex and fragmented and is in need of reform. One of its key recommendations is the formation of a national inspectorate within DEFRA and that policies for farm animal welfare and their implementation in England, Wales and Scotland should be co-ordinated by national and local authorities and the enforcement of legislation and regulations relating to the welfare of animals on farms should be a statutory responsibility of local authorities.

Independent legal guardianship of the welfare of farm animals

Another key concept introduced by the report is that of **guardianship**. The FAWC argues that the government should exercise independent legal guardianship over the welfare of animals as a part of its responsibility to act in the public interest generally in order to prevent the welfare of farm animals resting solely with those having a vested interest such as farmers, farm

assurance and disease monitoring schemes. This would include the establishment of an independent information service to assist in the development of market mechanisms to allow the concerned consumer to make informed choices about purchases according to welfare provenance.

A Strategy for Farm Animal Welfare in Great Britain

FAWC advocates that the primary aim of a future strategy for farm animal welfare in Great Britain should be that every animal has a life worth living and that a growing

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number have a good life, with a substantially higher standard of welfare than the minimum prescribed by the law.

The other major concept introduced by the FAWC in this Report is the power of the ‘concerned consumer,’ i.e. providing citizens with independent information about food, farming and farm animal welfare and to establish market mechanisms that enable concerned consumers to make informed decisions about the welfare provenance of both home-produced and imported animal products.

If the new strategy is to be effective in improving the welfare of farm animals, FAWC argues, eight conditions must be fulfilled, namely that:

- a. the government acts as the guardian of farm animal welfare;
- b. standards for a good life are defined by an independent body;
- c. minimum welfare standards are defined by quality of life;
- d. stockmen are educated and trained to a high standard about animal welfare;
- e. welfare assessment are valid, feasible and rigorous, with independent audit;
- f. the food supply chain shows due diligence and marketing claims are verified;
- g. citizens are educated about food and farming from childhood;
- h. animal products are labelled according to welfare provenance.

Finally the Report proposes strategic goals for the medium- to long-term which should be reflected in government and commercial policy by 2015. These are in the nature of duties upon farmers, the livestock farming industry and their representative bodies, retailers, suppliers, food service outlets and government and concern issues such as quality of life of farm animals, the enforcement of legislation, consumers and the food supply chain.