

GENERAL FARM ANIMAL WELFARE

Current situation

Following incentives to increase production created by the Common Agricultural Policy in the 1960s, livestock farming has become increasingly industrialised in the European Union, resulting in a multitude of welfare issues for all animals raised for food production. There is considerable concern over the way they are housed, treated, transported and killed, due to restricted freedom of movement and little ability to exercise natural behaviour. Poor welfare may result from injury, accidental or deliberate neglect, or ignorance of the animal's basic needs.

In recent years consumers have become increasingly concerned about the way animals are raised, for public health, food safety and animal welfare reasons. The results of two Eurobarometer surveys, conducted in 2005 and 2007¹, have in particular highlighted the attention to animal welfare.

The 2007 Eurobarometer survey revealed that 62% of EU citizens would be prepared to pay more for animal welfare friendly products and that 57% would pay more for welfare-friendly eggs. This trend has been reinforced over the past few years, forcing both industry and policymakers to adjust their ways of thinking.

Farmers and the food industry are, however, not yet meeting the demands of a large number of consumers, or taking advantage of the opportunities of the demand for high welfare products and quality products.

Private standards, farm assurance and labelling

Some food producers are not waiting for legislation to bring about changes in production methods. They are introducing their own standards in response to consumer demand. This is highlighted by the industry's response to consumer demand for eggs reared in high welfare systems and by the development of quality schemes such as Label Rouge in France or Freedom Food in the UK. Label Rouge's traditional free range poultry are the descendants of rustic slow-growing breeds. The animals are bred with great regard for their welfare: an ability to roam freely during the day, low stocking densities in the poultry houses, natural light. Freedom Food is one of the only Farm assurance scheme based solely on animal welfare. The standards are developed by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), using the latest scientific knowledge and best practice to develop practical and achievable standards. They cover indoor and outdoor production of meat poultry, laying hens, pigs, dairy, sheep and beef, as well as farmed salmon.

¹/2005: <http://www.eurogroupforanimals.org/consumers/pdf/leafleteurob2005.pdf>; 2007: http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/survey/sp_barometer_fa_en.pdf

These schemes are controlled through independent animal welfare audit programmes promoted by processors, retailers and multi-national corporations. The products from these schemes are identified through labelling.

The link between animal health and welfare

Health is a part of welfare and the two entities are inextricably linked: when an animal's health is poor, so is its welfare. Some indicators of poor welfare are classified as pathology and, as such, will also indicate poor health². These include body damage and 'disease', which refers in this case to infectious disease.

Genetic selection and changes in nutrition have greatly increased the productivity of some species, but have also increased the incidence of metabolic diseases and other disorders. In dairy cattle genetic selection and the feeding of concentrates have greatly increased milk production. This has placed a tremendous demand on the capacity of the cow to provide nutrients to the mammary gland. During early lactation, the high-yielding dairy cow is in negative energy balance, which leads to metabolic disorders (such as parturient hypocalcaemia³), mastitis, lameness and fertility problems, all positively correlated with milk yield. The connection between mastitis incidence and milk yield is poorly understood but it is possible that mastitis is partly a consequence of metabolic stress and hence of poor welfare, as suggested by the finding that the use of the drug Bovine Somatotrophin (BST) results in an increased incidence of mastitis, closely associated with the increased milk output⁴.

Legislation

Council of Europe

Overall animal welfare considerations involved in farming are articulated in the *Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes*, which opened for signature in 1976. The Convention applies to all animals (including fish, reptiles or amphibians) kept for the production of food, wool, skin, fur or other farming purposes. Recommendations have been produced by the Standing Committee to the Convention, on fish, pigs, turkeys, ducks, geese, fur animals, ratites, domestic fowl, calves, cattle, sheep and goats. They establish specific rules covering the differing needs of the various farmed species. Additional ones are still under discussion.

European Union

Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes transposes into EU law the Council of Europe Convention. Like the Convention, the Directive applies to all animals kept for the production of food, wool, skin, fur or other farming purposes. Responsibility is placed on owners and keepers of animals to ensure the welfare of animals under their care and prevent unnecessary pain, suffering or injury. An Annex to the Directive requires animals to be cared for by sufficient numbers of appropriately trained workers. About breeding methods, it specifies that "natural or artificial breeding or breeding procedures which cause or are likely to cause suffering or injury to any of the animals concerned must not be practiced". It also lays down other general principles, such as regular inspection, rapid treatment for sick animals, recording of veterinary treatment and mortality, general provisions with regard to livestock buildings, outdoor shelter, feed and water.

²/Broom, D.M. & Johnson, K.G. (1993). *Stress and Animal Welfare*. Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht.

³/Hypocalcemia is caused by low blood calcium level due to sudden loss of calcium into milk near or at time of calving.

⁴/SCAHAW (1999). Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare. Report on animal welfare aspects of the use of Bovine Somatotrophin.

Article 5 of the Directive requires the European Commission to submit to the Council of Ministers any proposals which may be necessary for the uniform application of the *European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes* and any Recommendations made under it. The only ones which have been transposed in Community legislation are the recommendations on pigs, laying hens, meat chickens and the Appendix C of the recommendation on cattle which refers to special provisions for calves.

The controls of farm animal welfare legislation are part of an integrated approach on feed and food controls. *Regulation (EC) No 882/2004* on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules, was adopted on 29 April 2004. It recognizes that animal health and animal welfare are important factors that contribute to the quality and safety of food, to the prevention of the spreading of animal diseases and to a humane treatment of animals. Under this Regulation, which applies since 1st January 2006, Member States are required to prepare a single integrated multi-annual national control plan to cover feed and food law, and the EU legislation on animal health and animal welfare.

However compliance with EU animal welfare legal requirements is low and enforcement has not been given a high priority by Member States. This is highlighted by many reports of mission of the Food and Veterinary Office to assess Member States systems of control.

In its White paper on food safety, the EU recognised that animal welfare needs to be integrated more fully in food policy⁵. The adoption of the first Community Action Plan on the protection and welfare of animals 2006-2010, also recognises that today the farming of animals is no longer viewed by European consumers simply as a means of food production but instead it is seen as relevant to other key social goals such as food safety and quality, environmental protection, sustainability and ensuring that animals are properly treated.

The link between animal health and animal welfare has been clearly recognised in *Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 on feed and food controls*, which highlights that animal health and animal welfare are important factors that contribute to the quality and safety of food, to the prevention of the spreading of animal diseases and to a humane treatment of animals, and in the recently adopted EU Animal Health Strategy 2007-2013 which states that “*The concept of animal health covers not only the absence of disease in animals, but also the critical relationship between the health of animals and their welfare*”. One of the Strategy's goals is “*to promote farming practices and animal welfare which prevent animal health related threats (...)*”. The strategy is looking at the implication of different production systems on animal health/welfare.

Growth Hormones in Meat Production

The EU banned the use of hormones for growth promoting purposes in meat production under *Council Directive 88/146/EEC of 7 March 1988 prohibiting the use in livestock farming of certain substances having a hormonal action*. Imports of meat from hormone-treated animals were banned under *Council Directive 88/299/EEC on trade in animals treated with certain substances having a hormonal action and their meat*. A series of Commission Decisions deal with approval of companies in third countries such as the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia to ensure that imported meat complies with these rules.

⁵/European Commission's White Paper on food safety COM (1999) 719 published in January 2000

Antibiotic Growth Promoters

Since 1 January 1999 *Regulation (EC) No 2821/98* bans the use of the four antibiotics virginamycin, tylosin phosphate, spiramycin and zinc bacitracin as additives in animal feed. In addition the EU did not renew the licences for three other substances (arprinocide, dinitolmide and ipronidazole) when they expired in September 1999. That eliminated almost all existing antibiotic growth promoters from use in the EU, as 15 others were already banned. In October 2003, the EU adopted *Regulation (EC) No 1831/2003 on additives for use in animal nutrition*, which prohibits since 1 January 2006 the marketing and use as growth promoters of antibiotics previously authorised – such as avilamycin. In May 2008 the Commission presented a report to the European Parliament and the Council on the use of coccidiostats and histomonostats as feed additives (COM (2008) 233) and available alternatives. The report concludes that at the present time the use of coccidiostats as a preventative measure for the control of coccidiosis in modern poultry production is essential and that available alternatives currently do not provide the same advantages as the use of coccidiostats as feed additives.

Use of BST to increase Milk Yields

Council Decision 94/936/EC of 20 December 1994 prohibited the marketing and use of *bovine somatotrophin (BST)* in the EU until 31 December 1999. Reports by the Commission's Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare on 10 March 1999 and of the Scientific Committee on Veterinary Measures relating to Public Health on 16 March 1999 concluded that milk produced by cows treated with BST represents a direct risk to animal welfare and to animal and human health. As a consequence the ban on the marketing and use of BST was made permanent.

Future Action

- Consequent to Council Directive 98/58/EC additional Community legislation to implement the Council of Europe Recommendations concerning the other farm animal species should be developed, the most urgent being beef and dairy cattle, and fish.
- On animal welfare grounds, the administration of growth and yield promoters, including BST, should remain prohibited in the EU.
- Assisted breeding technologies should be regulated from the animal welfare point of view. This could be given further consideration under Council Directive 98/58/EC.
- Labelling with high animal welfare standards should be integrated as just one component of a broader strategy of improved communication on animal welfare in the food chain.
- Compliance with animal welfare legal requirements must be improved by all actors in the food chain and member states must invest more resources in proper enforcement
- The Commission second action plan on the welfare on animals must include actions to better integrate animal welfare in all relevant EU policy areas and the development of specific standards for beef and dairy cattle and for farmed fish.