

field, providing they will be regularly updated. The references cannot be searched or sorted by subject.

Assessment of Animal Welfare and Animal Distress. Website resource compiled by J D Kuiper of the Department of Laboratory Animal Science, University of Utrecht, Netherlands, and T Allen of the Animal Welfare Information Center, National Agricultural Library, USA. <http://www.vetifo.demon.nl/aw/index.html>.

UK Medical Research Council's position on the use of animals in medical research

Recognizing public concern on the use of animals in research, the Medical Research Council (MRC) of the UK has produced a booklet which outlines its own position on experiments using animals. This sets out the MRC's principles including its active support for the development and dissemination of techniques for the '3Rs': reduction, refinement or replacement of animal experiments. The booklet includes sections on alternatives used by the MRC, past benefits arising from animal work, and how animal studies have advanced medicine. Seven examples of current research into disease are given and the role of animals in these programmes is outlined. Information is also provided on the species and numbers of animals used. There are notes on the legal controls on use of animals in scientific procedures and the booklet also sets out the MRC's expectations on the conduct of its scientists in promoting good practice in animal welfare over and above the requirements of the law. The booklet is clearly written and well produced with colour illustrations throughout.

Mice and Medicine: Animal Experiments, Medical Advances and the MRC. July 2000. Published by the Medical Research Council. 36pp. Paperback. Available from the publishers, 20 Park Crescent, London W1N 4AL.

Health controls on pet animals imported into the European Union

In 1998, the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals undertook a preliminary investigation of the conduct of veterinary checks on animals imported into the European Union (EU) for the pet industry. This was prompted by concern for the health and welfare of these imported animals and concern also that they could introduce infectious diseases into the EU. The results suggested that import controls were unsatisfactory in some Member States. In view of this, the Society, in cooperation with the Eurogroup for Animal Welfare, initiated a more extensive inquiry.

The study was conducted by seeking information, via a questionnaire sent to the chief veterinary officers of the EU member states, on the extent and nature of checks on animals imported for the pet trade. This included, for example, questions on whether physical checks and quarantining were carried out, whether shipments of birds were screened for Newcastle disease and/or avian influenza, and whether mammals were screened for rabies. Detailed replies were received from 10 states.

The authors of the report concluded from the results '*that the practice of veterinary checks in the European Union gives serious reason for concern about the import of highly contagious diseases like rabies, Newcastle disease and avian influenza*'. They also concluded that current practice does not match up to the requirements set by existing EU legislation and that there are considerable differences between states in disease control procedures in imported animals. Because, apparently, ports of entry for CITES-listed animals (those covered by the international convention on trade in endangered species) in some states are not always border posts for veterinary inspections, the authors believe that some CITES-listed animals may be entering the EU with no veterinary checks.

It is suggested that these problems may be in part due to the complexity, ambiguity and inconsistency of the veterinary regulations, in part due to lack of funds to provide appropriate expertise at border posts, and in part due to some member states assigning the issue a low priority.

A number of recommendations are made. Among these are that all ports of entry for CITES animals are checked to ensure the facilities for proper veterinary checks, to restrict imports to those from specified countries only, and to perform a thorough risk analysis of the possibility of introduction of infections.

The Veterinary Control in the European Union of Imported Pet Birds and Mammals of CITES and non-CITES Species. 2000. D W Van Liere and N Teesing. Published by Nederlandse Vereniging tot Bescherming van Dieren. ISBN 90-70272-59-8. 48pp. Paperback. Available from the publishers, Postbus 85980, 2508 CR Den Haag, The Netherlands.

Broiler Leg Health

In 1992 the UK Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) published a report on the welfare of broilers. In this, FAWC concluded that the prevalence of leg problems was unacceptable and considered that it was the industry's responsibility to make significant improvements. In response, the British Chicken Association established a wide-scale survey to monitor improvements in gait scores; it was hoped that the necessary improvements would be achieved through a range of genetic, nutritional, housing and management changes. The study was completed in June 2000 and representatives of the industry presented their findings to FAWC the next month.

FAWC gave credit to the industry *'for accepting its central role in improving broiler welfare'* but was unimpressed by the results. In a letter to the Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Agriculture (which was published at the FAWC website in December 2000), the Chairman expressed her disappointment with the lack of progress, stating that the survey findings *'provide no convincing evidence that measurable improvements in leg health have been achieved over the seven years of the study'*. In view of this, FAWC has urged the Government to initiate a definitive study on the current state of leg health in UK broilers. It is recommended that this study should, in addition to using existing methods for measuring leg problems, include abattoir examination of leg pathology.

FAWC also calls for rigorous application of welfare codes through inspections and for effective enforcement of legislation. It is hoped that this might encourage producers to slaughter birds a little earlier which would significantly reduce the incidence of leg problems. The letter continues: *'Retailers must also be made fully aware of the welfare implications of their demand for birds at the current marketed weights and encouraged to seek the benefits they could claim from providing consumers with slightly younger/lighter birds'*. The letter concludes by reinforcing the concerns first expressed in 1992 about the welfare problems of lameness in broilers. In response to this firm call for action, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has confirmed that it will be positively addressing the enforcement of welfare codes and legislation and has also made a proposal to conduct a major study aimed at identifying the causes of leg weakness problems.

Broiler Leg Health. December 2000. An open letter, dated 25th October 2000, from Judy MacArthur Clark, Chairman of the Farm Animal Welfare Council to Mr Elliot Morley, Parliamentary Secretary UK Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. 4pp. Available at www.maff.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/fawc.