

There have been many calls in the past for a Royal Commission to investigate animal experimentation. The Select Committee seems to have carried out their review of this subject with commendable thoroughness and efficiency. Its proposals are valuable because they could improve animal welfare and reduce the risk of the export of research to countries with poorer welfare standards. However, there may be risks in accepting them uncritically. Some of the proposals may seem politically attractive, but they should not be initiated without further consideration of the detail of how they might be achieved in practice, and of their possible ramifications.

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### **Code of recommendations for the welfare of meat and breeding chickens**

Under Section 3 of the UK's Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968, the Secretary of State for the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), England, the Scottish Ministers and the National Assembly for Wales are empowered to produce codes of recommendations on the welfare of farmed livestock. On 22 July 2002, DEFRA published a code of practice for the welfare of broilers and broiler breeders in England. It is 15 years since the publication, in 1987, of the government's previous code on this subject.

The Code covers a wide range of aspects of broiler rearing and breeding including stockmanship and staffing, feeding, health inspections, mutilations, accommodation, stocking density, record keeping, catching and handling, transport and disposal. Information is presented clearly and in a logical way, with the legal provisions relevant to each section being first set out in boxes, which are followed by commentary and specific guidance.

The Code is introduced in a preface in which its legal status is explained, the Five Freedoms are listed and recommended as a logical basis for the assessment of welfare, and the aims of the publication are set out. The Code is intended to encourage all those who care for farm animals to adopt the highest standards of husbandry.

This Code is required reading for all those responsible for the care of broilers and broiler breeders in England (all stockmen are required by law to be familiar with and to have access to appropriate welfare codes), but will also be of interest to those in the broiler industry elsewhere in the world. Similar codes are being produced in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and until these are published the old, 1987, welfare code for domestic fowl will still apply in these regions.

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*Meat Chickens and Breeding Chicks: Code of Practice for the Welfare of Livestock.* July 2002. Published by the UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. 23 pp A4 paperback. Available from DEFRA Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX, UK, and at <http://www.defra.gsi.gov.uk/animalh/welfare>.

### **Code of recommendations for the welfare of laying hens**

At the same time as publishing the code of practice for the welfare of broiler chickens and broiler breeder stock (see above), DEFRA has also published a new code for the welfare of laying hens. This covers the subject under more or less the same chapter headings as in the broiler code. In