

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

This section provides an opportunity to report, and where appropriate to comment on, miscellaneous items of animal welfare interest. It should enable readers to be alerted to the availability of a wide range of new material that otherwise might have gone unnoticed.

Use of animals in research

The Agricultural and Food Research Council (AFRC) in the UK not only supports work on the physiology, biochemistry and pathology of farm animals but is also deeply involved in the non-medical biological sciences and, increasingly over recent years, with cell and molecular biology and bio-technology.

The AFRC is thus deeply concerned with how animals are used in research, and has recently issued (December 1991) guidelines which set out the duties of all individuals involved in the use of animals, both in its own institutes and in projects funded by the AFRC.

There is an outline of the legislation controlling the use of animals in research in the UK with special emphasis on the *Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986*, a consideration of the special situation regarding farm animals, and on the legal/ethical problems involved in the genetic modification of animals. There is a section on the procedures to be adopted in the planning and design of experiments and also on the education and training requirements of persons intending to carry out procedures. The whole is rather slight (12 pages) but the general thrust of the document is to outline a particular area and then to refer the readers to other published guidelines, to the actual legislation, to official reports and to reference books and articles.

There is one important suggestion put forward in the guidelines: it is recommended that each institution should establish some form of local animal usage committee (or its equivalent) to promote discussion between all relevant members of staff on the ethical issues raised by animal research, to carry out regular reviews on animal usage and to provide an additional channel of communication for any staff anxieties about the way in which animals are being treated. It is suggested that non-scientists should be involved in any ethical debate over animal usage.

This *recommendation* to form local animal usage and ethical committees is, it is believed, unique in the UK. These committees are thought, by many scientists and administrators, to be irrelevant considering the strict control imposed through the 1986 Act. There are, however, a few in existence - mainly within commercial scientific organizations - but this recommendation by the AFRC seems to be the first formal approval meted out by the scientific establishment to this important concept.

Copies of the *AFRC Guidelines on the Use of Animals in Research* are obtainable free from the Agricultural and Food Research Council, Central Office, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon SN2 1UH.