

The welfare of broiler chickens

The broiler bird is the most commonly kept farm animal in the UK. Each year some 650 million of these animals are produced and eaten. The vast majority are reared intensively in, what many people would consider, overcrowded conditions. They have such a high growth rate of muscle tissue that, in some ways, they often overgrow the ability of their legs to support their bodyweight. Many of the birds consequently suffer from painful leg disorders in the latter part of their brief lives. They are collected, often in a somewhat rough manner, transported to the poultry slaughterhouse, suspended upside down on a hanging rail and stunned/killed by a sometimes inefficient electrical process. Broiler production is thus probably the biggest single animal welfare problem in the UK.

A report by Peter Stevenson on *The Welfare of Broiler Chickens* has recently been published by Compassion in World Farming Trust. It details, in a calm and largely unbiased manner, the scale and intensity of the situation. This publication will certainly help to bring to public attention the urgent need for constructive action as regards the welfare problems seemingly inherent in many parts of the broiler production industry.

The consumer has greatly benefited from the intensive production of poultry. Chicken is the cheapest meat available in the supermarket and its price per pound is often less than that charged for many vegetables. Any real welfare change in the broiler industry is probably going to mean an increase in price for the customer. But as John Webster states in his recent book *Animal Welfare: A Cool Eye Towards Eden* (Blackwell Science, 1995), 'since it is the consumer who has benefited most from the intensification of animal production, it is the consumer who will have to concede the most in order to ensure that farm animals get a fair deal.'

The Welfare of Broiler Chickens. Peter Stevenson (1995). Produced and published by Compassion in World Farming Trust (CIWFT): Petersfield. 16pp. Paperback. Obtainable from CIWFT, Charles House, 5A Charles Street, Petersfield, Hants GU32 3EH, UK (ISBN 1 900156 03 8). Price £2.50 plus postage and packaging.

Control of animal experimentation in New Zealand

In New Zealand the law states that no person can conduct any scientific research or use animals in teaching, other than in accordance with a code of ethical conduct drawn up by his or her research institute. The code must be approved by the Minister of Agriculture and one of the main requirements is that the institute must establish an Animal Ethics Committee to oversee the use of animals within that Institute. In effect animal experimentation in New Zealand is controlled by 'statutory' local animal ethical committees. This is in contrast with the UK situation where statutory control is centrally organized by the Home Office using the powers conferred on it by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. It is possible that the standards set in the two countries are very similar but are arrived at by different legal/administrative processes.

A Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes has recently been produced by the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee of the NZ Ministry of Agriculture, and has been adopted as a national code for New Zealand. The Code is largely based on the 5th edition of the successful Australian code

of practice for using animals in science, sponsored by the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Australian Agricultural Council. The Code covers in detail the legal responsibilities of both animal users and government inspectors, the general principles of the care and use of animals, the acquisition and care of animals in breeding and holding areas, the responsibilities of institutions and their animal ethical committees, and the responsibilities of individual scientists and teachers. There are a number of Appendices including a model code of ethical conduct, advice on clinical trials and a piece on the concepts and definitions of pain and distress.

This detailed and authoritative document could be of use to all concerned with the control, administration and conduct of scientific work using animals.

In the UK, where 'voluntary' local animal ethical committees are being set up by some institutions as a complementary system to the control exerted via the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act, the details of how the New Zealand animal ethics committees work could be especially relevant.

Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes. Code of Animal Welfare No 17. Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (1995). Ministry of Agriculture: Wellington. 63pp. Paperback. Obtainable from the publishers, PO Box 2526, Wellington, New Zealand (ISBN 0 478 07402 6, ISSN 1171-090X). Price New Zealand orders NZ\$5, overseas orders NZ\$6.

Funding for alternatives work

There has always been a difficulty in finding out possible funding sources for scientific work on refinement, reduction or replacement of animal experiments – the 3R alternatives. Barbara Orlans in her book *In the Name of Science: Issues in Responsible Animal Experimentation* (Oxford University Press, 1993) started a list of possible sources; this list was amplified and presented by Amelia Tarzi at the First World Congress on Alternatives and Animal Use in the Life Sciences, held in 1993 in Baltimore (USA). A new and expanded list under the authorship of Orlans and Tarzi has now been published as a directory by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. It contains the names, addresses, policies and sometimes indications of monies available of 59 organizations scattered across some 16 countries.

This publication is a most useful source of information. There could, however, be confusion in the minds of some possible 'seekers-of-funds', as to which organizations will support projects on any of the Three Rs and which will only assist with replacement work. Most scientists consider all the Three Rs as alternatives; some animal welfarists, and this is especially true of those with anti-vivisectionists tendencies, see only one alternative: the replacement of animals.

It might be useful, in future editions, if this semantic difficulty was discussed a little in the preface to the directory.

Three R Alternatives: An International Directory of Funding Sources. Amelia Tarzi and F Barbara Orlans (1995). The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: New York. 18pp. Paperback. Obtainable from the publishers, 424 East 92nd Street, New York, NY 10128-6804. Price US\$10.