

Intensive breeding of farm animals

Over the last 30 or so years the selection pressures put upon farm livestock have been such that we now have a number of vastly 'improved' animals – improved in the sense that they have changed in size and shape, grow faster, produce more and are more economical to keep. The speed at which these changes have been brought about has increased as techniques such as artificial insemination and embryo transfer have been developed and used.

However, concern is now being expressed in many quarters over the humaneness of some of these techniques and the welfare implications of having produced such altered and, seemingly abnormal animals.

Joyce d'Silva and Peter Stevenson of Compassion in World Farming Trust have recently produced a report on modern breeding technologies and their impact on the welfare of farm animals. It could be argued that this 22 page publication is somewhat selective in the material it brings forward, but the overall picture it presents is certainly disturbing. The main thrust of the attack is towards surgical and non-surgical embryo transfer – although artificial insemination is not above criticism. It is suggested that these techniques are often inhumane, unnecessary as routine animal husbandry procedures and, at the best, are badly regulated and supervised. The point is also strongly made that some of the animals produced by these intensive breeding methods now grow so much muscle in such a short period of time that many of them cannot stand up properly on their legs (broiler chickens towards the end of their rearing life) or cannot breed naturally any more (modern commercial strains of turkeys).

Compassion in World Farming Trust believes that the law should be changed both at the national and Economic Union level:

- a) to recognize the sentience of animals;
- b) to forbid breeding techniques which cause pain and distress to the animals involved; and
- c) to reverse the selective breeding which has given us grossly mutilated animals so that they can be brought back to a state of physiological integrity and wholeness.

Modern Breeding Technologies and the Welfare of Farm Animals. Joyce D'Silva and Peter Stevenson (1995). Edited by Tim O'Brien. Compassion in World Farming Trust: Petersfield. 22pp. Paperback. Obtainable from the publishers, Charles House, 5A Charles Street, Petersfield, Hants GU32 3EH, UK. Price £2.50.

Dog and cat neutering schemes

Each year large numbers of puppies and kittens are taken to animal shelters and veterinary groups for euthanasia. These unwanted young animals are largely the result of the indiscriminate breeding of household dogs and cats. The surplus animals not killed by shelter personnel and/or by veterinarians are often abandoned or escape, and are the root cause of the stray and feral, dog and cat problem.

A way of reducing this over production is to sterilize the potential breeding animals, especially the females, as early in their lives as possible. This approach to the problem has been much favoured in North America where various forms of dog and cat neutering schemes have been set up in many areas. These schemes are usually run on a local basis and are organized and often subsidized by animal welfare societies and/or by local veterinary groups.