

## REPORTS AND COMMENTS

### Research topics identified by New Zealand's Animal Welfare Advisory Committee

The role of New Zealand's national Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) is to advise the Minister of Agriculture on all matters relating to the welfare of animals. Under its current mission 'to facilitate the development of animal welfare policy and practice for New Zealand', one of NAWAC's tasks is to advise on areas requiring further research. In their *Annual Report* for 1999 (published June 2000) NAWAC identified 21 specific areas for further research. These include the following:

Fundamental studies to develop techniques that allow the objective measurement of stress/distress in animals. This is needed to enable proper evaluation of effects of various management procedures, which may compromise welfare;

Evaluation of extensive, outdoor husbandry systems for livestock, with particular attention to welfare problems associated with nutrition, climate, disease, transport and handling;

Investigation of the welfare impact of various routine procedures such as beak and claw trimming in hens and the induction of parturition in cattle;

Research into the prevention of various specific diseases in pastoral farming systems including: ryegrass staggers, nutritional diseases and internal and external parasitism;

Development of strategies to control lameness in cattle;

Research into the possibility of post-stunning ventral shearing and washing of sheep as an alternative to stressful pre-slaughter washing;

Devising more effective and humane methods of vertebrate pest control especially for possums, rabbits, wild cats, ferrets, rats and mice;

Development of alternatives to the use of mice for bioassay of shellfish toxins;

Design of a database on alternatives to the use of experimental animals in research, testing and teaching;

The NAWAC *Annual Report* includes also notes on areas of current welfare concern in New Zealand.

In contrast to the situation in New Zealand, in the UK and other countries, responsibility for animal welfare is divided among government departments. In the UK for example, the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for farm animal welfare and seeks advice from the Farm Animal Welfare Council; the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is responsible for wildlife and zoos and seeks advice on the latter from the Zoos Forum; and the Home Office is responsible for laboratory animals and is advised by, among others, the Animal Procedures Committee. While this system allows for a detailed focusing on the specific issues in each field, it seems likely that there would be advantages in having an umbrella group that, like NAWAC, could assess national welfare priorities across all fields.

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*Animal Welfare Advisory Committee Annual Report 1999* (2000). Animal Welfare Advisory Committee: Wellington. 36pp. Paperback. Obtainable from: NAWAC, c/o Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, PO Box 2526, Wellington, New Zealand (ISSN 1173-4396). Free.

### European Union enlargement and animal welfare

The European Union (EU) currently comprises 15 Member States. Moves are underway for its dramatic enlargement through the accession in coming years of 13 further applicant countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Turkey. Accession depends upon applicants being able to satisfy the required economic, political and legal obligations and criteria. Through this

process, the land area of the EU will increase by 34 per cent and its population by 105 million. Very large numbers of farm, laboratory and other animals will gain the welfare protection afforded by the EU legislation.

The Eurogroup for Animal Welfare and the International Branch of the RSPCA have worked together to produce a useful report reviewing the status of existing animal welfare legislation in the applicant countries, and outlining the RSPCA/Eurogroup programme to assist them in developing animal welfare legislation. Actually, it does considerably more than this, providing also brief accounts of the history of the EU and its institutions, and synopses of current and planned animal welfare legislation of the EU and Council of Europe. The report also provides contact details for relevant organizations in the applicant countries.

In providing a bird's-eye view of the current animal welfare legislation in applicant countries for contrast with EU legislation, the report provides a valuable background to help target the efforts of those wishing to help promote animal welfare in these countries.

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*The European Union Accession and Animal Welfare: An Introduction to European Animal Welfare Legislation* (2000). Eurogroup for Animal Welfare and RSPCA: UK. 55pp. Ring-bound. Obtainable from RSPCA, Causeway, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1HG, UK. Free.

### **Humane slaughter**

The use of electricity to stun animals before slaughter was first developed in Germany and France in the 1920s. Electrical stunning systems are now used widely in the slaughter of pigs and sheep and, increasingly, for cattle. The Humane Slaughter Association (HSA), as part of its endeavours to promote high standards of welfare at slaughter has recently published an excellent set of guidance notes on the subject. This, the fourth in the HSA's 'Guidance Notes' series, describes the theory and practice of the use of electricity to stun and kill 'red meat' animals: cattle, sheep, pigs and goats (electrical stunning of poultry is not covered).

Following a brief introduction to the electrical principles, the effects of using electricity to stun or kill, and the use of head-only and head-to-back systems are described. There are also sections on equipment and safety and maintenance. The document is very well presented and important points are illustrated with clear diagrams and tables. For example, there are tables of recommended currents for stunning and killing animals, of the expected duration of insensibility following head-only stunning, and of time to loss of brain function following various sticking methods. The correct positioning of electrodes is illustrated with diagrams and photographs.

Many millions of animals are slaughtered in the meat production industry every year. The humaneness of the procedure depends very greatly on the skill and knowledge of those who operate the equipment. These guidance notes are an excellent resource to help in the training of abattoir operators and supervisors in these important aspects of humaneness. Although the list of useful addresses provided on the inside back cover includes only UK organizations, these guidance notes, in clearly presenting the principles of the use of electricity for stunning and killing, are likely to prove valuable in the promotion and teaching of humane slaughter techniques worldwide.

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*Electrical Stunning of Red Meat Animals. Guidance Notes No 4* (2000). Humane Slaughter Association: Wheathampstead. 23pp. Paperback. Obtainable from: Humane Slaughter Association, The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN, UK (ISBN 1871561159). Price £3.50.