

BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEWS

Farm Animals and the Environment

Edited by Clive Phillips and David Piggins (1992). CAB International: Wallingford. 450pp. Hardback. Obtainable from the publishers, Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 8DE, UK (ISBN 0 85198 788 5) Price £52.50, US\$99.75 Americas only.

This substantial volume presents the edited versions of the twenty-two papers given at a conference on *Farm Animals and the Environment* at the University College of North Wales, Bangor on 4-5 September 1991. There are four sections, namely Environmental factors influencing the production and welfare of farm animals; Perception of the environment by farm animals; Animal responses to the environment, and Effects of farm animals on the human environment. In addition there is an appendix giving abstracts of eleven posters presented at the conference.

A supposedly novel feature of the book is 'the consideration of the interaction between farm animals and the environment principally from a zoocentric perspective rather than from an anthropocentric point of view'. Implicitly, therefore, it asks such questions as 'how does the animal perceive its environment?' and 'how can we measure its welfare?' Since it is well known that pressures of short term expediency and profitability can adversely affect the quality of the lives of our farm animals, these are uncontentious questions that urgently need answers. But is the so-called detached objectivity and quantification of the scientific approach necessarily good news for the animals? If only we gave them the benefit of any doubts arising from our inadequate understanding and acted *now* in ways that are 'obviously' humane (for example in terms of the *original* five freedoms on the Brambell Report, ie freedom of movement for an animal without difficulty to get up, lie down, groom naturally, turn round, and stretch its limbs) they would not be obliged to wait another quarter of a century for some clarity to emerge from the well-meaning but convenient smoke screen of current research. Of course we remain woefully ignorant of the details of our animals' needs, and these can be revealed only by the painstaking progress of conventional research; but in the meantime we need legislation to enforce implementation of the minimum standards of husbandry that we all know, on grounds of simple compassion, would be in the animals' best interests. If these grounds are construed as anthropomorphic, so be it.

Thomas Kuhn has told us a good deal about the trivial, puzzle solving, mopping-up nature of much scientific research, working conservatively within the paradigm of what is acceptable to a given 'invisible college' of workers. And Eric Ashby once characterized the 'originality' of much research as 'creeping along the boundaries of knowledge with a hand lens'. This well-intentioned book, summarizing work of a high standard by researchers of impeccable credentials, reviews a great deal of material that we already know in principle, and adds relatively little to what is already a more-than-sufficient basis for practical action. Consequently, it fails to grasp the nettle, producing yet more clouds of uncertainty at just that moment when the vested interests of the factory farming lobby might have been administered a thoroughly therapeutic sting.

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