

### **Genetic engineering and farm animals**

This is resource pack for teachers of 14 to 18 year-olds. The introductory notes suggest that it is suitable for students of a range of abilities and could be used on English, Science, Biology, Religious Education, Personal and Social Education, and General Studies courses. On the whole, the video is well produced and makes its points clearly. Patrick Holden of the Soil Association introduces the topic, saying: 'Agriculture is at an absolute crossroads - ahead is the high-tech solution which is more intensification, using genetic engineering, cloning animals, and factory farming: literally turning the countryside into a food factory.' The question posed by this pack is, do we 'want to maintain current emphasis on factory farming, adopt the free-range approach, or use genetic engineering to create new forms of farm animals?' The technology of genetic engineering and the threats genetic manipulation can pose to animal welfare are outlined, before the video goes on to question the benefits of this technology and whether they are justifiable. However, the view presented is one-sided, with no one from the pro-genetic engineering side actually appearing to present their counter arguments - although these arguments are mentioned. This puts some limits on the value of the pack as a teaching resource and, paradoxically, perhaps also weakens its thrust. Many people would agree that encouraging sixth form debates about these welfare and ethical issues is a good thing. This resource pack raises important points and it will prove valuable - as *one* of the inputs into such debate.

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*Genetic Engineering and Farm Animals*. Compassion in World Farming Trust (1997). Compassion in World Farming Trust: Petersfield. Resource pack consisting of VHS video (19min) and 18pp of information and classroom activity sheets. Obtainable from, Compassion in World Farming Trust, Charles House, 5A Charles Street, Petersfield, Hampshire GU32 3EH. Price £12.50.

### **FAWC report on dairy cattle welfare**

The length of this Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) report is a first indication that all might not be well with the modern dairy cow. For the first time, the report discusses the welfare of adults, calves and young cattle (but not at market, in transit or at slaughter, as these issues have been dealt with in separate FAWC reports). The point is made early on that, '...dairy farming conjures an image of animals at pasture, chewing the cud with few, if any, adverse effects on welfare'. The remainder of the report, however, soon dispels this image as little more than myth.

Topping the list of many welfare concerns, is the increasing incidence of lameness in dairy cows, which is currently 'at an unacceptable level'. In his letter to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the FAWC Chairman, Professor Sir Colin Spedding, calls for steps to reduce the incidence of this condition to be taken 'as a matter of urgency'. The report describes how some stockmen appear not to perceive lameness as a problem - which means it often remains untreated. This is despite the fact that lameness costs the dairy industry millions of pounds each year due to lower milk yields and the need for replacement animals.

'Involuntary' culling due to lameness, mastitis or poor fertility (all potential indicators of poor welfare) means that most modern dairy cows have a lifespan of less than four lactations. Although FAWC takes no position on whether the deliberate shortening of a