

Government Response to the FAWC Report on the Welfare Implications of Animal Breeding and Breeding Technologies in Commercial Agriculture

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) is an independent advisory body tasked with reviewing the welfare of UK farm animals and informing the Government on any legislative or other changes that may be necessary. In 2004 FAWC published a 43 page report on welfare implications relating to animal breeding and animal breeding technologies. FAWC believes that breeding practices have the potential to both positively and negatively affect farm animal welfare and that it is an area requiring consideration of both the needs of animals, to ensure their good welfare, and the needs of producers, to remain viable in a highly competitive and global market.

Eight recommendations were put forward by FAWC for consideration by the Government and following 3 years of deliberation, DEFRA's On-Farm Animal Welfare Team have issued a response. Of the 8 recommendations proposed, the Government fully accepted 1, partially accepted 3 and rejected 4. Where recommendations have been rejected this is partly because some of the issues have already been addressed in the intervening years and also due to the Government's belief that there may be more effective ways to address the concerns raised.

Recommendations rejected include those related to the establishment of a new Standing Committee (SC) to evaluate and advise the Government regarding breeding technologies. The Government thought that there would be no clear role for such a body and also that the set-up cost of an entirely new advisory body would be disproportionate. Additionally, introducing too many regulations may have a negative effect on the UK farming industry, both through stifling future innovations and developments of breeding technologies, and through hampering the competitiveness of the UK industry within a rapidly evolving and competitive international market. It was also thought necessary to address any concerns in a more global fashion and that an EU-based approach may be more appropriate, indeed a number of EU initiatives have already been launched, such as the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE) and the European Animal Disease, Genomics Network of Excellence for Animal Health and Food Safety (EADGENE). Further to this, the Government put forward that FAWC itself may step up and assume the advisory roles suggested for a new SC.

Also rejected was the recommendation for closure of potential loopholes in the law which could, in FAWC's opinion, allow genetically modified or cloned animals to enter UK commercial agriculture, uncontrolled. This was rejected partly because there are already strict regulations at EU level for controlling the deliberate release and marketing of genetically modified organisms.

The need to address gaps in existing legislation relating to farm animal breeding procedures in order to promote

animal welfare was partially accepted. The Government accepts that there are some areas that do not currently fall under the legislative framework that could potentially allow breeding practices to enter agriculture uncontrolled but considers "the likelihood that a breeding technique with detrimental consequences for animal welfare would be introduced and take off commercially in UK agriculture is extremely low". Attention is also drawn to an EU-developed project Code-EFABAR (Code of Good Practice for European Farm Animal Breeding and Reproduction) and the European Forum for Farm Animal Breeders initiative: FABRE-TP (Farm Animal Breeding and Reproduction Technology Platform).

Recommendations for increased surveillance and monitoring of breeding technologies were partially accepted. The Government recognises that further methods may be employed and that more could be accomplished with the data that is currently collected but also notes that there are a number of data collection and surveillance initiatives already underway, for example the BPEX pig health scheme and the Veterinary Surveillance Strategy.

The Government fully accepted the recommendation about research and training programmes regarding the demands of new genotypes in relation to their production system. It is the Government's view that "the industry has made significant progress in the areas of research and training in breeding technologies and the needs of modern and novel genotypes but we recognise that there is more work that could be done. We will continue to take opportunities to encourage, and work in partnership with, industry, and will continue to commit funding to research into breeding and breeding technologies to help identify issues and solutions for the industry".

Government Response to the FAWC Report on the Welfare Implications of Animal Breeding and Breeding Technologies in Commercial Agriculture July 2007, pp 16 A4. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: On-Farm Animal Welfare Team. Available at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/farmed/breeding_response.pdf.

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UFAW

A new Animal Health Strategy for the European Union (2007-2013) Where "Prevention is Better Than Cure"

Animal health is only a part of animal welfare but still a very important part, and one which has been firmly brought home to livestock industries in recent years with the re-emergence of diseases such as avian influenza, foot and mouth and, more recently, bluetongue.

The rapid growth of the European Union from a community of 12 countries in 1995 to 27 in 2007 has resulted in a substantial expansion in trade of animals and animal products. Consequently the task of successfully promoting animal health and controlling diseases requires a much more cohesive and group-orientated approach. In view of this, the