

time are not made apparent in the document but there is undoubtedly growing public concern about the use of primates in research.

The SSC believes that non-human primates are required in biomedical research for two reasons: first, because occasionally no alternatives can be found for testing vaccines or biological agents for specificity and safety in a 'near-human' immune system; and second, because they are used as models for the study of infectious and non-infectious diseases for which no other suitable animal models exist. Five examples of human diseases for which the SSC believes primate research is very important in the development of controls are outlined. These are AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, hepatitis, and immune dysfunctions. The SSC states that the number of captive-bred animals required to maintain the outbred population that is needed for studies of biological agents and vaccines is high, and that large, diverse, well-characterised captive breeding colonies are needed in Europe.

Whilst emphasising its belief in the scientific case for the continued use of non-human primates, the SSC says that it does not feel competent to decide on the balance of the costs to the experimental animals and the benefits for the future of humans or other animals. It believes that this question is one for the European Commission's European Group of Ethics of Sciences and New Technologies. However, "if it is accepted that the use of primates in research is ethical, those animals should be housed and treated in a way that fulfils their species-specific requirements and avoids any unnecessary suffering".

This is not a very substantial contribution to the debate. If produced in response to a perceived threat to progress in biomedical research arising through a future ban on the use of non-human primates, then it has a rather surprisingly casual and hastily produced feel.

The Need for Non-Human Primates in Biomedical Research: Statement of the Scientific Steering Committee. Adopted at its meeting of 4–5 April 2002. Health & Consumer Protection Directorate-General of the European Commission. 4 pp A4. Available at http://europa.eu.int/comm./food/fs/sc/ssc/out25_en.pdf.

The future of farming in England

Many branches of the UK's farming industry have been struggling in the face of increasing challenges for many years. The foot and mouth disease epidemic of 2001 focused unprecedented (at least in recent years) attention on the livestock industry and prompted a great deal of rumination about the way forward.

In August 2001, the Prime Minister appointed a Commission under the Chairmanship of Sir Donald Curry to "advise the Government on how we can create a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector which contributes to a thriving and sustainable rural economy, advances environmental, economic, health and animal welfare goals, and is consistent with the Government's aims for Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform, enlargement of the EU and increased trade liberalisation". The Commission published its report in January 2002.

The report starts with a utopian vision of the future of farming in England: "... farmers ... are technically efficient and run profitable businesses". These farmers "continue to receive payment from the public purse but only for public benefits that the public wants and needs". "Farming is fully integrated into the wider economy of rural areas" and "the vibrancy and diversity of this economy offers positive additional or alternative employment and business opportunities to farmers, their families and employees". And so on, including: "... provide high standards of environmental management, food safety and animal welfare". The goal is thus clearly, and rosily, defined, but can it be reached?

The Commission is in no doubt that there is a long way to go. It states that England's farming and food industry is unsustainable "in every sense of that term" and that it is serving nobody well. The diagnosis of the cause of the problem is that farming has become detached from the rest of the economy and the environment. The Government is urged to press for substantial reform to the CAP production subsidy system towards a situation in which public money is used to pay for public goods that the public wants and needs (eg rewards for high environmental and animal welfare standards), and farmers are urged to join forces with retailers to find ways of cutting costs and making a selling point out of high standards and an attractive countryside. Cutting costs and high welfare standards frequently do not go hand in hand and it would be unrealistic to think that meeting these objectives and competing with the growing pressure of cheap imports is going to be easy. Time will tell what can be achieved.

Farming and Food: A Sustainable Future. January 2002. Report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming. 152 pp A4 paperback. Available from the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming, Admiralty Arch, The Mall, London SW1A 2AS, UK, and from the Cabinet Office website at <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/farming>.

Long-distance transport of livestock in the EC: control of staging points

Between October 1999 and February 2001, the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) carried out missions to seven Member States to evaluate controls at staging points and to assess progress with the implementation of Council Directive 91/628/EEC¹. Staging points have been established and approved in eight Member States on the basis of Council Regulation (EC) No 1255/97². It is at these staging points that the obligatory break for animals undergoing long-distance transport takes place.

It was found that all the staging points visited were under the control of an official veterinarian, but that the extent of this control varied. In some instances, the veterinarian failed to ensure that minor deficiencies were corrected, and in others, the veterinarian failed to ensure that provisions with serious consequences for animal welfare were met. The apparent differences in standards of control may be explained by the lack of instructions concerning the organisation of these controls in the majority of Member States visited. The report also indicates that animal welfare was compromised at certain staging points because veterinarians were failing to exclude animals from further transport that were unfit for the intended journey. In addition, at particular staging points, horses were not provided with proper access to water, and there was a failure to check route plans on several occasions. In some cases, staging points were sited too close to other animal facilities, allowing a risk of disease transmission. Furthermore, some facilities could not be cleaned or disinfected properly because of the nature of the material used in their construction and, in some cases, there was a failure to keep complete records of animal movements.

The report makes a number of recommendations to Competent Authorities, one of which is that staging points should be approved only after checks to ensure that the facilities and operation meet all requirements. Also, all staging points should be operated under adequate control from an official veterinarian, and guidance should be provided to these veterinarians regarding the frequency of inspections and the procedures to be followed. In addition, to ensure that journey times are respected, communication between Member States should be improved regarding the number of consignments, and the level of compliance of route plans should be checked at staging points.