

The *MAFF Business Plan* also briefly lists other activities in which the UK Government is involved, such as: the ongoing study into TB epidemiology initiated by the Bourne report; the relaxation of the UK quarantine regulations and the introduction of the Pet Travel Scheme; the development of a strategy for the reduction of antibiotic resistance due to the use of veterinary products; and measures to monitor, control and reduce the incidence of BSE in UK cattle.

Greater insight into the direction of UK concern for farm animal welfare can be found in the FAWC report. FAWC is an independent advisory body concerned with the welfare of farm animals which advises the UK's Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food on any legislative or other changes that may be necessary. The majority of FAWC's efforts during 1999/2000 have been focused on ongoing projects investigating the welfare of animals at slaughter and the welfare of farm animals at livestock markets. One area to which the Council has recently turned its attention, is that of farm assurance schemes and farm animal welfare. FAWC is presently reviewing schemes applying to animals on-farm, at market, in transit and at place of slaughter. As part of this review, FAWC has widened its traditional national focus to one that is more international – in their words taking a 'food chain' approach which will also take into account the welfare of animals whose products are imported into the UK, not simply those produced within the UK. To this end, FAWC has endeavoured to improve its links with those EU committees having remits similar to its own. FAWC expects to publish its review next year. The main R&D priorities highlighted last year – livestock breeding programmes, stocking densities, mutilations, disease, stockmanship and technology transfer – remain unchanged and specific issues of concern are highlighted in the report.

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food: Business Plan 2000-01. MAFF (2000). MAFF: London. 56pp. Paperback. Obtainable from, MAFF Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX, UK; and www.maff.gov.uk. Free.

Farm Animal Welfare Council Annual Review 1999/2000. FAWC: (2000). FAWC: London. 13pp. Paperback. Obtainable from the publishers, Area 51, 1A Page Street, London SW1P 4PQ, UK; and www.Maff.gov.uk/animalh/welfare. Free.

Report of the Burns inquiry into hunting with hounds

Anyone turning to the recently published findings of the Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales, chaired by Lord Burns, and seeking to find a definitive answer as to whether hunting with dogs should be banned will be disappointed. As stated at the beginning of the report, the Inquiry did not attempt to answer such a question, nor to propose a compromise solution. Instead, it stuck to its remit of inquiring into the practical aspects of different types of hunting with dogs and their impact on the rural economy, agriculture and pest control, the management and conservation of wildlife, and animal welfare; as well as considering the consequences of any ban. However, the Inquiry makes clear its preferences with regard to methods of hunting.

Established in December 1999, the Inquiry generated an extensive amount of information during its short existence, receiving over 440 substantial written responses, holding meetings and commissioning research in 12 areas. Three reports, submitted by Bateson and Harris (*The Effects of Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales on the Welfare of Deer, Foxes, Mink and Hare*), Macdonald *et al* (*Management and Control of Populations of Foxes, Deer, Hares and Mink in England and Wales and the Impact of Hunting with Dogs*) and White *et al* (*Management of the Population of Foxes, Deer, Hares and Mink and the Impact of Hunting with Dogs*), contribute the bulk of information which is referred to in those parts of the Report which are of most immediate concern to this journal: the chapters entitled 'Population management and

control', 'Animal welfare' and 'Practical aspects of hunting: the concerns'. The complete text of these submissions is available on a CD-ROM that accompanies the report, or via the website: (www.huntinginquiry.gov.uk).

In the chapter on 'Population management and control', the report concludes that hunting with hounds accounts for relatively few of the foxes, deer, hares and mink that are killed each year in the UK; shooting accounts for far the greatest numbers. The exception appears to be in upland areas, where dogs are extensively used in flushing out foxes or during the digging out of a fox that has sought protection in a burrow. It also indicates that there is some consensus that a cull of the species under consideration is needed in some parts of the country – to reduce damage and destruction to crops or livestock. The evidence arguing for a control of numbers is strongest for deer but much more equivocal for hares.

In the chapters on 'Animal welfare' and 'Practical aspects of hunting: the concerns', the Inquiry considered the humaneness of all potential (legal) methods of control – to determine whether a ban on hunting with hounds would improve the welfare of the hunted animals or not. The Inquiry concluded that hunting with hounds seriously compromises the welfare of the hunted animal, but that all methods of control have serious, adverse welfare implications. Preferred options for the control of foxes and deer are stated: 'lamping' using rifles (where the animal is picked up in the beam of a vehicle-mounted high-powered spot) is favoured for foxes; for deer, dog-assisted stalking (where an animal is approached and shot with a high-powered rifle) is regarded as probably the most humane. The Inquiry was less clear on which method of control it preferred for hare and mink. The adverse impact on welfare of shooting an animal and only wounding it was also highlighted, and thought by the Inquiry to be of most concern when shotguns are used. The report argues that hunting with hounds may be preferable to the use of shotguns. It suggests that a demonstration of competency and skill in firearm use, through training, would lessen the chances of a negative impact on welfare.

The Report concludes that if hunting with hounds is not banned, consideration should be given to the introduction of some form of licensing system and regulation of hunting through closed seasons – as is common practice outside the UK. If hunting with hounds is banned, then the Inquiry felt that a closed season for the taking of hares should still be considered, along with training of stalkers and the use of snares. Finally, it noted that if a ban were implemented enforcement might be problematic, that exceptions to the ban would be needed, and that a period of adjustment would be preferable to an immediate ban. Also, that if a ban on hunting with hounds was not to be challenged under *European Convention on Human Rights*, any Bill would have to be carefully worded – reflecting concern over unnecessary suffering, not simply mere disapproval.

The response of the UK Government to the Inquiry is now keenly awaited by all interested parties.

Report of The Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales. Home Department (2000). The Stationery Office: Norwich. 223pp. Paperback and CD-ROM. Obtainable from the publishers, PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN, UK; and book.orders@theso.co.uk (ISBN 0101476329). Price £32.50.

Regulating GMOs

The science and technologies of genetic modification are relatively new, and cause concern to many people. While genetic modification offers the hope of breakthroughs that will substantially improve health and the quality of life for humans and animals, it also has the potential to cause great harm and suffering. The UK Advisory Committee on Genetic Modification (ACGM) was set up in 1984 to advise the UK Government on all aspects of human and environmental safety