

Reports and Comments

OIE global strategy on animal welfare

On the 24th May 2017 the 180 member countries of the OIE (The World Organisation for Animal Health) adopted its first global strategy on animal welfare. According to the OIE, the aim is to provide continuing direction and co-ordination to achieve “A world where the welfare of animals is respected, promoted and advanced, in ways that complement the pursuit of animal health, human well-being, socio-economic development and environmental sustainability”. The OIE recognises that animals may be legitimately kept for a range of purposes, as working animals, companion animals, used for production of food, fibre and other animal products, or for scientific and educational purposes and are transported and traded internationally. However, these purposes also carry an associated ethical responsibility to ensure that the animal uses are humane. The strategy developed by the OIE has four pillars, namely: development of animal welfare standards; capacity building and education; communication with governments, organisations and the public; and, implementation of animal welfare standards and policies. To support these into the future, the strategy describes planned activities which will include establishing a forum to: bring together members of the animal welfare research community, the global animal welfare movement and the global animal-source food sector; developing and implementing science-based animal welfare standards; encouraging and supporting the ongoing development, evolution and implementation of regional animal welfare strategies; strengthening national veterinary services; and strengthening relationships between animal welfare science and other areas of science.

OIE Global Animal Welfare Strategy (May 2017). A4, 8 pages. OIE published online. Available for download from the OIE website: http://www.oie.int/fileadmin/home/eng/Media_Center/docs/pdf/855G/AW/EN_OIE_AW_Strategy.pdf.

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The Farm Animal Welfare Committee has published two Reports to inform Government within the United Kingdom

Within England, Scotland and Wales the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) acts as an advisory body to Government, and others, and periodically publishes independent Reports that cover issues considered important to the welfare of farmed animals. FAWC believes that all farmed animals should have “a life worth living” and increasingly “a good life”. In February 2017, FAWC published two Reports.

FAWC Opinion on the links between the health and well-being of farmers and farm animal welfare

Stockmanship is considered to be one of the most important factors directly affecting farm animal welfare. In 2007, the Farm Animal Welfare Council wrote that: “In any production system, the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitude of the stockman are integral to the standard of welfare. Good stockmanship can often compensate for deficiencies in a livestock production system but the converse is never true”.

It is therefore unsurprising that the health and well-being of farmers is likely to impact on the quality of their stockmanship which, in turn, will affect the welfare of animals in their care. A recent Opinion, published by FAWC, discusses the links and interactions between a farmer’s health and well-being and farm animal welfare.

FAWC defines health as: “the state of freedom from physical or psychological illness or injury”, and well-being is considered to: “encompass health as well as wider positive and negative aspects, including a person’s subjective impression of their life, and objective factors, such as financial security and family support”. A ‘farmer’ is regarded as the person who cares for livestock on a day-to-day basis (be that the farmer, a member of their family, or a part or full-time employed stockperson).

To explore the well-being of farmers, FAWC carried out a written consultation and held a stakeholder meeting, as well as considering relevant published literature. FAWC also drew on the findings from the Farming Community Network (FCN) Helpline. The FCN is an organisation that aims to provide pastoral and practical support to farmers through a network of volunteers — including a telephone helpline which is available every day of the year, from 0700 to 2300h.

During 2013, the FCN received 1,082 calls and animal welfare was a topic of concern in 11% of calls. General health and depression/mental health were also common concerns. Farming is a highly physical job and one in which there is risk of injury. When a farmer is physically unable to care for animals to an appropriate standard (eg through age, physical illness or injury, or depression), and if insufficient support is available, then both the farmer and animals may suffer. FAWC notes that “issues of poor animal health and welfare might be revealing of physical and mental pressures or distress in a farmer”. Where farmers are suffering from depression, suicide is a potential risk and FAWC quotes figures from a UK study that found, between 1993 and 2008, farmers were 1.5 to 2.5 times more likely to commit suicide than non-farmers.

A salient point made by FAWC is that people are often concerned that they may make a situation worse if they say something to a person whose behaviour has changed indi-

cating that there is a problem. However, the FCN state that: “It is the experience of FCN and those working in the mental health profession that these fears are unfounded. On the contrary, expressing concern for the individual most often has a very positive impact, demonstrating to the person that someone cares about their predicament”.

Various scenarios, based on real-life situations, are used throughout the Report and they give the reader an insight into how farm animal welfare may be adversely affected when the farmer caring for them is, themselves, suffering.

At the end of the Opinion, FAWC makes a number of recommendations, such as the need of Government, and other supporting agencies, to “strengthen mechanisms for early warning, on a national basis, of poor or deteriorating farmer well-being and the associated possible impacts on farm animal welfare”. Additionally, FAWC recommends that Government and existing agencies and support networks work more closely together “sharing information and best practice where possible and making joint decisions on which agency (or agencies) will take responsibility for each case”.

Other areas highlighted for change include: greater publicity of support networks to ensure that those in need are aware of them; and that more training is provided, both to young farmers about the future health problems that they may face, and to those interacting with farmers, such as veterinarians, on how to recognise risk factors for client health.

Opinion on the Links Between the Health and Well-Being of Farmers and Farm Animal Welfare (February 2017). A4, 31 pages. Farm Animal Welfare Committee. Available for download from the FAWC website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fawc-advice-to-government> or by contacting the FAWC at the following address: Area 5B, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR, UK.

FAWC Report on Stockmanship and Farm Animal Welfare (June 2017). A4, 40 pages. Farm Animal Welfare Council. Available for download from the FAWC website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fawc-advice-to-government>.

FAWC Opinion on sustainable agriculture and farm animal welfare

Sustainable agriculture is described by FAWC as “agriculture carried out in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability to meet the needs of the future”. A number of factors that are commonly discussed when considering sustainable agriculture are mentioned, including: sustainable resource use; reduction of waste; reducing impact on environment; mitigation/adaptation for climate change; and protecting rural communities.

Sustainable intensification is also referred to and linked specifically with increasing agricultural productivity and a farm’s financial performance. There is a need for increased agricultural production to feed a growing population (there

are 7.4 billion people alive in the world today and this is projected to reach 11.2 billion in 2100) and to cater for a change in dietary preference to one in which greater quantities of meat and dairy products are consumed. However, although increasing agricultural livestock production may be necessary, there is a concern that this may be achieved at a cost to animal welfare. FAWC state that a “significant amount of work on sustainability of food production did not reference farm animal welfare in any detail”. Additionally, FAWC makes the point that it is important to not focus on increasing production solely, but to also address food consumption, as well as waste and losses that occur during production, sale and consumption.

When considering how sustainable livestock agriculture may positively or negatively affect farm animal welfare the following topics are discussed: herd/flock size; indoor housing; intensification; imported animal management systems; economics; consumers; stockmanship; precision livestock farming; animal health; whole farm management; breeding; and climate change.

For example, FAWC observes that larger farms may positively affect animal welfare due to the “professionalism of management, specialisation of staff, the ability to employ a full-time veterinarian and opportunity to invest in infrastructure and facilities, particularly when handling animals safely”. However, the disadvantages of larger farms may include larger group sizes and increased stocking density which, in turn, can negatively affect behaviour and make assessing animal welfare at an individual level more difficult.

The Opinion closes with a number of conclusions and recommendations. FAWC believes that animal welfare must be included when discussing sustainable agricultural policy and that where production and efficiency in farm animal agriculture is increased, that this should not be at a cost to animal welfare. Fundamentally, FAWC state that animal welfare is integral to sustainable agriculture and the following key principles are put forward:

- Agriculture cannot be considered sustainable if it is achieved at an unacceptable cost to animal welfare;
- Sustainable agriculture must take account of the fact that farmed animals are sentient individuals; and
- Sustainable agriculture must include a duty of care for the physical and mental needs and natures of farmed animals, and should not depend on prolonged or routine use of pharmaceuticals, or on mutilations.

Opinion on Sustainable Agriculture and Farm Animal Welfare (February 2017). A4, 18 pages. Farm Animal Welfare Committee. Available for download from the FAWC website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/farm-animal-welfare-committee-fawc> or by contacting the FAWC at the following address: Area 5B, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR, UK.

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