

## Reports and Comments

### Genetic welfare problems of companion animals: an information resource for prospective pet owners and breeders

The genetic health of companion animals has been a 'hot topic' in recent years, since the screening of the documentary 'Pedigree Dogs Exposed' on BBC television in August 2008. This programme alleged that many breeds of pedigree dogs were unhealthy and suffered from significant health and welfare problems caused by extensive inbreeding — a view that has attracted much support. This programme built on previous reports by the Companion Animal Welfare Council on the subject (CAWC 2006, 2008).

Subsequently, four further reports were published addressing the subject (APGAW 2009; CAWC 2009; Rooney & Sargan 2009; Bateson 2010). One of the results of these reports and the associated public interest and concern on health issues related to unsuitable breeding — which continues to be a top welfare concern of veterinarians and vet nurses (PDSA 2011) — was the formation of an independent Advisory Council on the Welfare Issues of Dog Breeding (<http://dogadvisorycouncil.org.uk/>).

Another was that there was a need to better educate and inform the public, both breeders and present and prospective pet owners, on the health and welfare of their animals. To address this, UFAW has launched a website that aims to provide clear information about the welfare consequences of hereditary problems in different breeds — not only for dogs but cats, rabbits and others too. The hope is that this will assist responsible breeders in efforts to avoid or tackle genetic health problems in their breed and allow prospective pet owners to better decide which species, breed or strain to choose, and allow them to ask the right questions when obtaining their pet so as to avoid unintentionally perpetuating known genetic problems.

A 'work in progress', the website features information on a range of conditions in individual breeds and details on the clinical and pathological effects of these conditions, the intensity and duration of their welfare impacts, the number of animals affected, diagnosis and genetics of the condition, how to know whether an animal is a carrier of the condition or likely to be affected and the methods and prospects for its elimination. At present, amongst the conditions addressed on the site are: brachycephalic airways obstruction syndrome, mitral valve disease, gastric dilatation-volvulus syndrome, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, dermoid sinus and 'bubble-eye' in, variously, English bulldogs, Boston terriers, Pugs, Cavalier King Charles spaniels, Great Danes, Maine Coons, Rhodesian Ridgebacks and goldfish. Non-inclusion of a breed or condition at this time does not necessarily mean that the condition is not a problem or that the breed has no genetic disorders.

More conditions and breeds are being added on a regular basis and the aim is to feature all conditions of major welfare concern.

**Genetic Welfare Problems of Companion Animals: An Information Resource for Prospective Pet Owners and Breeders** (2011). UFAW web resource. Available at: <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/geneticwelfareproblems.php>.

### References

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### Lameness in sheep: UK Farm Animal Welfare Council Opinion

The UK Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) last considered the welfare of sheep in 1994 when it reviewed the industry as a whole and published a 40-page report that included 69 recommendations for improving welfare. These covered: shepherding, training, health and disease, mutilations, identification and unfit sheep. Lameness was recognised as a common welfare problem in the 1994 report and the recent Opinion focuses specifically on this issue. It is widely accepted that lameness causes pain and it is estimated that at any one time in the UK, approximately three million sheep are lame (in 2008 the UK herd comprised of 15.6 million breeding ewes and 16.5 million lambs).