

Applying welfare training in global commercial settings

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Abstract

Around the world, people who care for animals as stock-keepers, stockmen, farmers, producers are placed in a position where they can greatly influence the quality of life of the animals they manage. A stock-keeper's viewpoint on animal welfare and animal care will be enormously influenced by their cultural frame, how animals are viewed in the society where they live, and how much 'permission to care' the individual stockman sees as being granted to them in the place where they work. Sometimes the capacity to care is subsumed by commercial production pressures, lack of time, lack of motivation, perceived lack of resources, perceived lack of 'value' for individual animals, lack of perception of animal issues, or sometimes through a lack of knowledge or exposure to concepts of animal care and welfare. The extent and focus of animal welfare training is moulded by the needs of the audience, the company, the retailer or the legislator. For these reasons 'one size fits all' training is not usually appropriate, although there may be some general rules which can be applied to nearly all welfare training. These general rules include: do not start by importing values and technology/procedures which those trained cannot use; understand why the people you train do what they do; the initial training should be sympathetic to local knowledge and resources; engage with the industry and its affiliates and if at all possible, obtain government, professional and academic support and involvement; and beware that in the absence of knowledge and training, new technologies and new procedures can create new welfare problems.

Keywords: animal welfare, capacity building, commercial, knowledge, maximisation, training

Introduction

There is no single starting position for the attitude to animals. It is apparent that people who care for animals on a farm or in a zoo or a laboratory, in a kennel or in a stable, are influenced by the cultural frame of the country where they work, how animals are viewed in their society, and how much 'permission to care' they feel granted to them in the place where they work. This paper is based on personal experience in training people from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures, but it is also apparent from some published work that cultural differences are relevant to differing opinions to, and approaches for, dealing with animal welfare issues (Butterworth *et al* 2007; Fraser 2008, 2011).

Our practical experience and finding has been that the capacity of individuals to effectively care for animals, particularly in commercial environments, can be subsumed by production pressures, by real lack of time, by perceived lack of time, by lack of motivation, by perceived lack of resources, perceived lack of 'value' for individual animals, a lack of perception of animal issues, or sometimes, through a lack of knowledge or exposure to concepts of animal care and welfare.

For these reasons, 'training' in animal use, animal care and concepts of animal welfare within animal production has been used to influence and build the 'capacities' of animal carers and keepers. Training in animal welfare does not take a fixed form — the type, depth and intensity of training depends very much on the needs of those to be trained. It is sometimes the case that people are not aware or have even considered that training in animal welfare issues could even be of value or interest to them. It is common for farmers, veterinarians, legislators and enforcers of animal welfare to have a 'starting position' that, because they already work with animals on a day-to-day basis, and because they already have professional or work-based experience, that they already have a good knowledge of animal welfare concepts. In many cases, people are presented for training not because they have a burning desire to learn and to be 'trained' but because it is *compulsory*, ie some businesses demand training in animal care issues — perhaps as a part of retailer requirements or part of social responsibility coverage. How people respond to compulsory training will, of course, be variable from person-to-person, but there may be some reason and the opportunity to hope that people coming to be 'trained' may actually find the process: (i)

Interesting — many stock-keepers are truly interested in what they do and respond positively to being involved in ‘training’ which adds to their knowledge and capacities (more on capacities later); (ii) *Challenging* — peoples’ views and opinions on animal issues are a part of their chosen position in life and there is unlikely to be universal agreement or acceptance of animal welfare topics.

Overall, animal welfare training could be seen as ‘capacity building’, ie an activity which strengthens the knowledge, abilities, skills and behaviours of individuals and improves institutional structures and processes, such that organisations can efficiently meet their goals in a sustainable way.

The keywords are ‘knowledge’, ‘abilities’, ‘skills’, ‘behaviour of individuals’, ‘improvement’ and ‘sustainable’ and the content of training material and courses may wish to address these areas to help ensure that long-term capacity is built rather than to result in a short-term blip in interest and motivation. This paper is based on personal exposure in the arena of training in animal welfare in a wide range of settings and sets out to identify some experiences and points of reference which others who carry out this type of activity may find illuminating.

What can be the content of animal welfare training?

Animal welfare training may start at a very ‘fundamental’ level with the concepts of pain and stress, the links between good stockmanship and care, and productivity and ‘quality’. In some places — introductions to what people see as the meaning of animal welfare and examples of different cultural views on welfare are appropriate — and it seems that most people are, in fact, interested to see what other people, even in quite different cultures, believe and feel about animals and animal issues. During this early phase of ‘introduction’ to animal welfare ideas it can be educational for both the listener but also for the ‘lecturer’ to see the huge differences in position and opinion about issues that occur from country-to-country. In some places, much of this introductory knowledge is ‘assumed’ (rightly or wrongly) and training starts at a different level with discussion and information on technical approaches to welfare issues — how to tackle poor bedding or litter conditions to improve animal comfort and skin lesions, how to ensure humane killing procedures in a slaughterhouse, how to manage biosecurity, stock management, specific disease conditions and transport of animals is addressed. In some cases, the curriculum is dictated by the organisation — which may wish to cover very specific areas to suit the needs of a retailer (for example). A recent development is the inclusion of training requirements into animal legislation — EU Directive 2007/43/EC (2007) implemented in 2010, requires training of poultry keepers in physiology, drinking and feeding needs, animal behaviour, concept of stress, practical aspects of handling of chickens, catching, loading and transport, emergency care for chickens, emergency killing and culling, preventive biosecurity measures. Some general ‘rules’ based on experience may be relevant:

- Do not start by importing values and technology/procedures which those trained will not and cannot use;
- Understand why the people you train do what they do, and why they keep doing it. The initial training must be sympathetic to local knowledge and resources;
- Engage with the industry and its affiliates, they were here before you, and will remain as the active forces after you have gone. If at all possible, obtain government, professional and academic support and involvement; and
- Beware — in the absence of knowledge and training, new technologies and new procedures can create new welfare problems.

Animal welfare is as personal a construction as a religious or sporting viewpoint and so it is almost inevitable that an audience will contain people with a mixed level of acceptance and uptake of ‘animal welfare’ ideas. Training in animal care and welfare can be challenging and often forms part of a gradual process of involvement in hearts, minds, attitudes and social norms — and so it may take some time. We learned that we would have to be patient. Is it possible to use the variability in acceptance of animal welfare ideas as an advantage (rather than a hindrance) to animal welfare learning? We believe that the answer is ‘yes’.

Training: different needs for different users

We identified that there were different ‘needs’ for training, two example-types of training requirement are detailed here.

Training needs group 1

Those not requiring, or interested in, animal welfare constructs and animal welfare assessment methods to the level required for certification purposes — for example veterinary groups, state veterinary organisations and legislators/ministry who seem to be more interested in ‘general animal welfare assessment concepts’ rather than having the intention to carry out actual practical assessment.

Training needs group 2

For those requiring training for ‘higher level/certification level’ purposes — where accurate, repeatable and consistent use of animal welfare assessment methods are demanded by the needs of the task. These ‘higher level’ users are usually linked to the farm assurance and certification bodies who are starting to consider the potential for using outcome-based measures in farm inspection schemes.

By identifying the needs of those people who were to be trained, we attempted, wherever possible, to tailor the material and the style of training to the audience. This was partly achieved through a policy of always visiting the farms and factories where the trainees worked before the training took place, to ensure that the material used in the training was relevant to the farming systems which the trainees would work.

Animal outcome assessment training

At the moment, it seems that there is interest in the possible future uptake and implementation of animal-based measures

in a wide range of applications. There are now moves to adopt animal-based assessment in farm assurance, in local state veterinary inspection of farms, and in assisting legislators to understand the 'baseline' position regarding animal welfare on the farms in their control. Similarly, there is interest in animal-based assessment for non-governmental organisations who, through campaigns (including training), are influencing skill levels and capacity in producers, and by farmer groups who are working to provide management support to add value through improved welfare. Sometimes, production companies see welfare as part of their company quality approach and so wish their staff to be trained and given capacities in animal welfare concepts or assessment methods. The experience to date has been that people from all of these types of organisations have been trained in animal welfare concepts (and sometimes in animal welfare assessment methods) and companies and others have started to use their animal welfare capacity and animal-based assessment for a variety of purposes.

Welfare training for compliance purposes

Government inspection bodies — for example state veterinary staff — may wish to be trained in animal welfare as a part of their commitment to general awareness of ways to assess animal welfare on-farm and at slaughter. The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) sets some global standards for animal welfare. Many of the OIE's 174 countries and territories do not have the legal framework in place to support the implementation of animal welfare activity or to adopt the OIE recommendations. Where these countries do have a legal framework to permit this to happen they may have inadequate implementation mechanisms to ensure practical application and enforcement of standards. In these cases, training can be of value in providing information and on-farm (or at-slaughter) experience to strengthen capacities in the area of animal welfare. Individuals and groups in society play a vital role in this process through the work they undertake in many of the OIE countries, particularly in the developing and less developed countries which is closely linked with the delivery of technical knowledge and expertise crucial in raising standards and upgrading procedures (RSPCA 2010). In Europe, candidate and the potential candidate countries can be assisted toward harmonising legislation through training, and by assisting the main stakeholders in identifying gaps in standards and by developing intervention tools, such as education and training programmes to address specific training needs. Animal Welfare NGOs find many ways to influence welfare change, and education programmes are a part of much of their work. Animal welfare maximisation training has been taking place in a number of programmes held in collaboration with the international animal welfare NGOs. Through this type of training, higher local animal welfare standards may increase market competitiveness, and NGOs can play a significant role in raising public and consumer awareness and through training and education programmes, and support and creation of societal 'market conditions'. By increasing awareness of animal welfare issues in the public, this can

act as a driver for the development and implementation of animal welfare standards by local agencies, and these standards can be rolled out by the trained individuals and groups into farming and slaughterhouse practice.

Welfare training for assurance purposes

The use of assurance schemes in different parts of the world in promoting higher levels of farm animal welfare is highly variable. 'Private' standard owners and assurance bodies can be flexible in both driving standards upwards and in responding to local conditions. Private assurance schemes (not government-driven), whether linked to NGOs (RSPCA Freedom Food, for example) specifically seeking to promote higher standards of farm animal welfare, or participants in retailer-driven standards, sometimes use training as part of their strategies for improving farm animal welfare. In some countries, scheme membership has now shifted from being entirely voluntary, to the current position where many producers now view membership to be an entry requirement (effectively non-voluntary) to retailer shelves and, for these, training is often required. In the overall assessment picture, animal welfare is perceived as a component of broader ranging assessments (Rushen *et al* 2010), which also contain environmental, animal medicine use, work environment safety, food safety and retailer specific requirements and so 'animal welfare' training is often only part of a suite of trained activities. Improvements in animal welfare can positively affect aspects of 'quality' through, for example, a reduction in bruising, bone breaks and blood spots (which translate to improved meat quality). If there is an increasing emphasis of assessment of animal-based measures (ABMs), this may create a shift in the way that farms are inspected — moving the inspection from 'provision' to assessment based on assessing the 'quality of animal lives' (Butterworth *et al* 2011). Personnel trained in the principles of animal welfare assessment and in the use of practical methods for assessing the welfare of animals on-farm are of value in private assurance schemes and also within the management of larger farms or farming companies which have many sites. Our experience has been that it is the need to provide evidence of high welfare standards, often to retailers or to the purchasers of farm produce, which motivates companies to support (and fund) welfare training. Once the personnel have been trained, they can often themselves train other people (train the trainers) in the company, and so, with time, the overall level of 'capacity' in welfare understanding and technical skill increases. This drives up both animal welfare on the farms in the company, the 'quality' aspects of the products, and the level of welfare understanding which the company can demonstrate to farm assurance companies and to retailers.

The practical issues surrounding of face-to-face training

Training people *in situ* has its particular set of problems and issues. These issues may be seen as limitations by many — but there is much good knowledge and practical information available in academic journals and institutes

Figure 1



Personnel from poultry companies in Asia (top) and Latin America (bottom). These staff are trained on their own farms and in the classroom. Cultural, farming technique differences and geographical and climatic factors lead to different approaches to training in different regions.

which could and should find mechanisms for transfer to farmers, processors, legislators and assurance bodies — and some of this can be achieved through local day-to-day training (Butterworth 2009).

The pros of face-to-face training

- Face-to-face training has both benefits and costs. This kind of personal training creates learning links between those trained and the trainers so the ‘users’ can see that they are not alone and that others around them are thinking in similar ways and are being enabled (even given permission) to express care skills and to apply animal welfare concepts in

their day-to-day care of animals. This aspect cannot be overstated — in some countries it is as much the ‘permission’ to show concern for animal welfare that enables capacity to be built and for stock-keepers to start to bring their own animal welfare ideas to work.

- Creating networks of trained people who can form the core of a ‘train the trainers’ system — where these individuals become seen as local experts who can advise, train and support others. Whilst this is not exclusive to ‘face-to-face’ training, our experience has been that the networks of people who meet at ‘face-to-face’ training events is valuable in the establishment of a sustainable training network in the longer term.

- Taking the training immediately and using in example farms (Figure 1), slaughterhouses and processors in the country. For much training activity it seems appropriate to consolidate classroom training by immediately (as part of the course) visiting the farm, transporter, slaughterhouse, or the processor and then to apply the training immediately in the field (Mullan *et al* 2011). This, of course, depends on biosecurity and other limitations — but the advantage of ‘taking the people to the place where they work’ and getting them to apply what they have just learned is huge — and experience indicates that this is not only a great consolidation but can also be great learning, networking and fun.

The cons of face-to-face learning

There are also disadvantages associated with ‘face-to-face’ training.

Travel

Training can be very travel intensive — for each organisation, it is usually necessary to visit each country and to carry out training face-to-face and to attend and use farms in the country of the organisation being trained as examples. In the future, it may be necessary to ‘centralise’ training and to carry out ‘joint training events’ to which a number of organisations are invited and this may be a solution to helping to streamline training activities. It is also in theory possible to create e-training — distance learning and student choice web or DVD-based training — but whilst this kind of generic training may be suited to some users — the face-to-face and tailored training usually requested by companies and NGOs can have huge benefits.

Costs

The costs associated with face-to-face training have to be negotiated between the provider and the ‘client’. Compared to commercial training courses for other areas of business, in general animal welfare training events represent ‘good value’ — and the expectation by many potential ‘clients’ is that this kind of training will be at very low cost, or even at no cost — because animal welfare is often seen as ‘someone else’s responsibility’. So decisions on realistic pricing of training need to be made to ensure that the trainers/trainer institutes are supported realistically for the time taken — and cost can be a limiting factor for many potential clients.

Maintaining the momentum

After training events there may be a honeymoon period of interest and sometimes of great positive action but, with time, the momentum can slow and the good intentions and the drive of those trained and the networks created, and even the 'permission' to engage with animal welfare issues in the long term can fade. Solutions to help overcome some of these problems might include:

- DO create individuals who are given the authority to train others;
- DO create reference material which will be of real use;
- DO create the belief that good animal welfare is (and will continue to be) good for business;
- DO NOT leave behind new and expensive technology which cannot be maintained;
- DO NOT create a constant requirement to be tied to the training organisation through web-based material etc. In other words, do not commit the organisation to costly agreements for use of a website or of further expensive training 'updates'. Indeed, this would probably reduce the long-term sustainability of interest for many organisations.

Distance learning

As well as face-to-face training, there are other mechanisms for provision of information and learning in animal welfare. Alongside 'face-to-face' activity, distance learning has the potential to provide some levels of animal welfare training.

There have been suggestions that welfare assessment systems such as Welfare Quality® could be turned into a distance learning/e-learning scheme. It may be possible to create an electronic learning module for the introductory concepts of outcome-based assessment. However, it is also clear that the practical and 'on-farm' training is best carried out face-to-face and with contact with animals in real situations rather than through simulations. The final 'approval' of the ability to carry out the assessment in a reliable and repeatable way should not be carried out without some direct involvement of a trainer. To ensure that there is credibility and consistency within the people and organisations who are 'approved' to use the assessment methods, assessment of the trainees with respect to the repeatability and consistency should be a part of the training programme. This degree of 'control' of quality is likely to be important. During the early stages of adoption of any welfare assessment system, it will be required to ensure that the farm company itself is satisfied that the animal welfare assessments carried out on its farms are 'credible' and are actually of 'use' to the company in terms of improving performance and animal outcomes. Also, with time, it may be useful to demonstrate to the purchasing public or to retailers that credible animal welfare claims are being made by the companies, and so transparent training and approval methods for trainees are important to help provide this assurance.

Conclusion

The focus of animal welfare training is moulded by the needs of the audience so 'one-size-fits-all' training is not usually appropriate. Face-to-face training linked with farm, transport, slaughter and processor visits can be a powerful tool. People will often have very variable starting positions with regard to animal welfare and so it is appropriate not only to accept this — but to actually embrace and enjoy the diversity of views. This diversity often makes discussion and group learning activity interesting and lively — as different views spark debate. Training face-to-face is time and travel costly — and the monetary costs of this should be realistically considered, but this type of training has the potential to spread (and through trained trainers to 'seed') information and welfare concepts across companies and regions, and to penetrate areas in which 'permission' to discuss animal welfare is only just beginning to be a commercial possibility.

The potential benefits of commercial animal welfare training can be summed up as being:

- As a means to drive up quality in farming businesses through education, information, provision of additional personal skills and 'increased capacity' for staff;
- As a means of directly affecting animal welfare through the influence of trained people who work with the animals.

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