

# **Culminating compassion without creating chaos - Community expectations exceeding current agricultural practice and standards**

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## **Introduction**

As community and consumer expectations heighten in relation to animal welfare, specific production systems and practices will come under increased scrutiny. Differences in the treatment of and level of legal protection for different animals will become more apparent. Overseas trends indicate that in many instances retail driven audit systems require higher welfare practices than regulatory standards. This paper briefly describes relevant evolving societal changes relating to education, animal law and market trends, and the potential impact of these aspects on the future of agriculture in Australia.

## **Changing social attitudes**

From the second half of the twentieth century, a major shift emerged in social concern, consciousness and action in western societies. An early focus on civil liberties then expanded to include broader issues including the environment and animals. Also occurring was a fundamental shift from an anthropocentric perspective where man deemed himself as the 'centre of the universe' towards a 'deep ecology' approach where man considers himself part of the environment. Concern for the treatment and rights of animals gained momentum in the 1970s at which time, Australian philosopher Peter Singer published 'Animal Liberation' which raised the issue of the ethics of our use and treatment of animals (Singer, 1975). Since that time, in addition to Singer, several US philosophers including Tom Regan and Bernard Rollin have published widely on the moral considerations regarding the use of animals for scientific purposes, cosmetic testing and agricultural production (Regan, 1989; Rollin, 1995).

Post World War II changes in agricultural systems saw small, family owned farms transformed into large, corporate intensive production units which urgently require close scrutiny in terms of ethics and welfare (Rollin, 2004). A consequence of the social ethics revolution has been the call for ethical production systems, where

consumers demand to know everything about products they are purchasing including the 'environmental foot print' and now the 'welfare hoof print'.

### *Humane education*

In parallel with social change, there has been a recognised need for formal humane education. In general terms, humane education fosters an understanding of and commitment to the notion that human rights, environmental preservation and animal protection are interconnected and resolving these issues is essential for a healthy and sustainable society. Since 1996, in North America, the Institute for Humane Education (IHE) has been promoting and providing training for humane education professionals ([www.humaneeducation.org](http://www.humaneeducation.org)). IHE has affiliated with Cambridge College to offer the first Masters of Education in humane education in the US.

Over recent years in Australia, there has been a strong interest in the potential impact of the media and other factors on the development of children's values. In 2004, the Federal Government committed nearly \$30M over four years, for the implementation of the 'Values in Education in Australian Schools' initiative, which consists of the following nine broad values (DEST, 2004);

- Care & Compassion
- Doing Your Best
- Fair Go
- Freedom
- Honesty & Trustworthiness
- Integrity
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Tolerance & Inclusion

Schools are now viewed as playing a pivotal role in supporting parents and the community in general, in helping to foster a caring and compassionate future generation (<http://www.valuesineducation.org.au>).

In 2007, the animal advocacy groups Voiceless and Compassion in World Farming hosted the Humane Education Symposium at Griffith University, Queensland ([www.ciwf.org.au](http://www.ciwf.org.au)). This is believed to be the first time that an event focusing on humane education has been held in Australia. Professor Terry Lovat, University of

Newcastle highlighted the strong linkages between the 'Values in Education' initiative and the need for teachers to access suitable resource materials that probe ethical treatment of animals (Lovat, 2007). Research conducted by Griffith University in 11 schools involving Year 7 and 10 teachers and students (97 teachers and 344 students) highlighted a strong interest but general lack of knowledge regarding the needs of animals, how animals are treated and ethics. Most teachers surveyed believed that some of the values in the 'Values Education' initiative, although intended to only relate to humans, should also extend to animals (Tulloch & Verrinder, 2007). Compassion in World Farming has produced a resource for upper primary and secondary school teachers titled 'Farm Animals and Us in Australia', which links with several core values outlined in the 'Values in Education' program (<http://ciwf.org.au/resources.htm>).

### *Animal advocacy groups*

There has been an increase in the level of activity of both Australian based as well as international groups concerning animal welfare issues in Australia over the past 5-10 years. In 2004, the US based animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) demanded that the Australian government prohibit mulesing of sheep and live animal export. There has been significant media coverage of these issues in Australia and overseas ([www.peta.org/mc/index.asp](http://www.peta.org/mc/index.asp)). Similarly, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) launched a global campaign against long haulage transport, in particular live animal export (<http://www.wspa.org.au/farmwelfare.asp?campaignType=31>). Advocacy groups in Australia include Animals Australia, RSPCA, Compassion in World Farming, Voiceless, Animal Angels and many others. Some groups focus on providing educational materials ([www.cwif.org.au](http://www.cwif.org.au); [www.rspca.org.au](http://www.rspca.org.au)) and seek to establish dialogue with industry and government. The RSPCA's Animal Rescue television program has also been very successful in eliciting interest and concern relating to animal welfare issues (pers comm. Lynn Smith, RSPCA WA Education Officer). A very effective medium used by most advocacy groups is the internet making access easy, quick and free. This enables students, teachers and the general public to access a huge range of information and ways to become involved in animal issues. For example, Voiceless has established Animal Club, which provides teaching resources for students on care and compassion to animals ([www.voiceless.org.au](http://www.voiceless.org.au)). Voiceless Animal Advocates is another initiative aimed at encouraging university students to become involved in animal welfare issues. Some animal advocacy groups are also active in hosting scientific seminars, as well as providing funding for research, awards and scholarships.

## **Emergence of animal law in Australia**

Animal law has been an emerging area in North America since the 1980s and there has been an increasing number of Australian Universities offering courses in animal law, with this trend likely to continue (White, 2008).

In 2003, following the Cormo Express incident where Saudi Arabia rejected a shipment of 58,000 sheep and over 5000 subsequently died, the NSW Young Lawyers Association called for an immediate enquiry into the trade.

In March this year, the Australian Law Reform Commission released a media statement predicting that animal rights could become the next great social movement in Australia ([www.alrc.gov.au/media/2008/mr0303.html](http://www.alrc.gov.au/media/2008/mr0303.html)).

There has been a high level of interest by some members of the legal profession in animal ethics and welfare with animal advocacy groups such as Animals Australia and Voiceless seeking legal counsel regarding animal rights and the law. Animal law groups that have been established include Lawyers for Animals ([www.lawyersforanimals.org.au](http://www.lawyersforanimals.org.au)) and Barristers Animal Welfare Panel ([www.vicbar.com.au/e.1.12.asp](http://www.vicbar.com.au/e.1.12.asp)).

## **Role of veterinarians**

There is increasing recognition and action being taken to incorporate specific teaching of welfare and ethics in veterinary undergraduate courses in Australian universities. Veterinary studies comprise units having a strong science base including a focus on productivity aspects of farm animals. Of the six veterinary schools in Australia, all but two incorporate animal welfare as a distinct unit (Collins, 2008). Interestingly, student based animal welfare interest groups have been established in at least two universities. The veterinary profession plays a pivotal role in animal welfare such as individual animal treatment, advice on disease prevention programs, research, teaching, ethics committees, policy and standard development, and working with industry to enhance welfare standards. The Australian College of Veterinary Scientists includes an animal welfare chapter that is growing rapidly.

Given that future generations of veterinarians will have a greater knowledge and understanding of animal welfare and ethics, it is likely that more will seek careers in this field. As a consequence, it is possible that a discrete animal welfare and ethics

veterinary lobby group may be established, as distinct from the Australian Veterinary Association which already has a welfare interest group. In the US, earlier this year, the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights (AVAR) joined forces with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) to establish the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association ([www.humanesociety.org/vets](http://www.humanesociety.org/vets)) which encourages veterinarians to speak out against questionable practices inherent in some animal based commercial enterprises, including agriculture.

### **What are current community expectations?**

There has been limited research regarding public opinion relating to animal welfare in Australia. Most has been commissioned by specific groups and organisations and are only available as reports rather than being published in the scientific literature (MRC, 1994).

In 2006, a survey was conducted as part of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) to gain a better insight into the level of understanding and relative importance of animal welfare to the Australian public. The main findings showed that animal welfare was of high interest with 'prevention of cruelty' and 'humane treatment' best describing the term 'animal welfare'. Most people were concerned about live animal export and battery hens but it was also revealed that the level of knowledge and understanding was not substantial (Mazur, 2006). The study also reported that surveyed respondents accessed information on animal welfare from three main sources; the RSPCA (76%), the internet (71%) and veterinarians (52%). In most cases, information was not actively sought unless interest was raised.

In 2003, the public response to the Cormo Express incident resulted in over 15,000 letters being sent to Prime Minister John Howard indicating a strong sentiment by the community (pers comm. Peter Thornber, DAFF).

With regard to battery cages for egg production, there is an increasing political will in some jurisdictions to phase out this system. Earlier this year, ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanthorpe announced that all ACT government agencies would cease using battery eggs ([www.chiefminister.act.gov.au/media.php?v=6581](http://www.chiefminister.act.gov.au/media.php?v=6581)) to encourage others to do the same. He then proposed a national ban to State and Territory Agriculture Ministers, with support for a national approach being expressed by Tasmania and the Northern Territory ([www.chiefminister.act.gov.au/media.php?v=6677](http://www.chiefminister.act.gov.au/media.php?v=6677)). In addition three

Tasmanian local government authorities have passed motions that caterers use only non-battery cage eggs for functions.

### **What are current attitudes to welfare in agriculture?**

In general, our understanding of animal welfare is changing from the 'prevention of cruelty' to 'meeting the needs of animals'. In Western Australia, the title of the Act was changed from the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1928* to the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*. For many involved in agriculture, the newer notion of 'welfare' is filtering slowly through the sector. There is a possibility that unless the agricultural sector's understanding of this new concept of animal welfare is consistent with the community's, then this disparity will lead to possible resentment and disengagement.

Factors which influence attitudes and behaviour of people in the agricultural sector are complex and include tradition, economics, practical imperatives, accountability, and skills and knowledge. For intensive production systems, a fundamental change has occurred where a traditional 'husbandry' and acknowledgement of the importance of health and care of all animals has been replaced by values in line with industrialization such as efficiency and productivity (Rollin, 2004). It is important to emphasise that those swept up in the wave of 'agro-industrialisation' are not inherently cruel or lacking compassion but rather the systems do not afford close scrutiny, as to do so would result in the whole system being abandoned; an option that the industry is unable to contemplate due to the massive economic impact of modifying established infrastructures.

In Australia, greater emphasis is being placed on animal welfare in agriculture, where industry bodies are developing strategies, investing in research and promoting good welfare practices. For example, Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) has significantly increased its investment over the past four years to develop alternatives to mulesing. In addition, several industry based welfare standards have been developed including the pig, egg and dairy industries ([www.australianpork.com.au](http://www.australianpork.com.au); [www.aecl.org](http://www.aecl.org); [www.dairy.com.au](http://www.dairy.com.au)).

In response to consumer demand, the Australian egg industry accredits operators for free-range production but there is concern that space allowances to qualify for free-range labeling (14 birds per m<sup>2</sup>) are much less than EU standards (9 birds per m<sup>2</sup>) and

the Free Range Egg Producers Association of Australia (7 birds per m<sup>2</sup>) ([search.choice.com.au/search?w=animal+welfare](http://search.choice.com.au/search?w=animal+welfare)). Third party audit programs may offer greater impartiality and credibility.

The importance of leadership within industry is critical to anticipate future developments and prepare industry to meet emerging needs and expectations (Fraser, 2002). To date, there has been limited technical information on alternative systems developed or promoted by industry to assist producers interested in either modifying their systems or establishing new ones.

### **impact on agriculture, retailers and government**

Major changes are occurring overseas in relation to animal welfare. In 2004, the international animal health body, Office des Epizooties (OIE) incorporated animal welfare into the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code affirming the importance of animal welfare ([www.oie.int/eng/bien\\_etre/en\\_introduction.htm](http://www.oie.int/eng/bien_etre/en_introduction.htm)). Since 1999, the UK banned sow stalls and the EU agreed to phase out battery cages and sow stalls by 2012 (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/farmed/pigs/index.htm>).

A greater recognition of the influence of retailers and consumers in relation to changing farm practices has emerged in the last ten years. In 1999, major US food outlet McDonalds Corporation commenced animal welfare auditing of slaughter plants supplying meat (Grandin, 2001). Burger King and others have embarked on similar programs.

In December 2007, Marks and Spencer was awarded 'Compassionate Supermarket of the Year' by leading UK animal advocate group, Compassion in World Farming (CIWF), an achievement which they promote ([www.marksandspencer.com](http://www.marksandspencer.com)). The CIWF website also provides shoppers with a ranking of supermarkets in terms of welfare commitment ([www.ciwf.org](http://www.ciwf.org)).

Retailers have been a key player in terms of expectations and negotiations with the Australian wool industry regarding the phasing out of mulesing (<http://www.dettmjuke.no/Facts%20about%20Mulesing.pdf>).

The role of legislative standards in Australia is also changing with welfare codes being transformed into mandatory standards and best practice guidelines. Except for South

Australia, codes are not legally enforceable but can be used as evidence in cruelty prosecution cases.

Providing customer and community assurance of high welfare standards is becoming increasingly important. Assurances may be provided through legal standards or market driven audit systems. The first relies upon a breach occurring before action is taken, whereas the latter relies upon continuous monitoring and maintenance of specified standards (Higgs & Evans, 2008). Other features of welfare audit systems are that they impact on many individuals concurrently, can be modified reasonably quickly and failure to comply may deny market access. It is becoming increasingly apparent that legislative standards may not be sufficiently high to meet customer expectations.

### **The role of science and ethics**

There has been a call for science to provide the answers to help resolve the ongoing debate relating to specific animal production systems and practices by developing objective animal welfare measures (MLA/AWI, 2005). Unfortunately, science is at an impasse in relation to agreement on how to measure and assess welfare. Over the past twenty years, two main schools of thought have emerged – one places a strong emphasis on physiological changes whilst the other considers that behavioural expression can more accurately define the welfare status of an animal. Depending on which approach is used, quite different interpretations can result (Barnett & Hemsworth, 1990). More recently, acknowledgement of the limitations of relying heavily on behavioural assessments, has led to greater refinement of methodologies (Duncan, 2005). A key challenge for science is to be able to improve systems to better meet the needs of animals as both intensive and 'alternative' systems have inherent problems (Barnett et al, 2001).

But despite industry and government seeking scientific validation of production systems or practices, there remains the ethical aspects. These in part, may be addressed by accessing more specific information on direct impacts on animals but increasingly, there is recognition that science may not always be able to provide the answers. In essence, our treatment of animals reflects our own humanity and for an increasing number of people, restriction of movement and reduced expression of normal behaviour, is being questioned and considered by some to be unacceptable.

## **The future**

As the level of social consciousness rises and society becomes more aware of farming practices, it is inevitable that greater concern and questioning will be expressed. In many situations, agriculture faces a difficult challenge in responding effectively, given that expected change is both rapid and extreme. Chaos is created when a lack of control occurs. In order to maintain control, industry needs to acknowledge that many traditional farming practices have a limited future and to be receptive to major changes. Similarly, animal advocates and concerned consumers need to accept that change is difficult and that the way forward is to support industry to improve standards. An incremental approach allows for agreed milestones to be achieved within specified timeframes (Mellor and Stafford, 1999). There are many ways to support industry including providing funding to research alternatives as well as paying premiums for welfare friendly produce. Government also plays an important role in supporting the development of welfare friendly systems as well as relevant and effective legislative change. The New Zealand approach is to focus on welfare outcomes rather than defining specific features in legal standards to better meet community expectations, animal requirements and industry considerations (O'Hara et al, 2007).

Effective and continued constructive communication is critical. It is essential to engage with receptive people in the industry so that they are involved in the process from the concept stage. The Australian Animal Welfare Strategy ([www.daff.wa.gov.au](http://www.daff.wa.gov.au)) is playing a pivotal role in bringing industry representatives from various sectors together, including agriculture, to identify key welfare issues and potential solutions.

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