

The globalisation of animal welfare: A New Zealand and Australian perspective on recent developments of strategic importance

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Introduction

Over the last 60 years, there have been dramatic increases in agricultural productivity, due to general advances in agricultural and veterinary science, specific improvements in genetics, nutrition and disease control and prophylaxis, plus the impact of agriculture support programmes. There has also been an inexorable and substantial move to more intensive systems of production, especially in the more densely populated nations of Europe, Asia and North America and, particularly, with pigs, poultry and beef cattle. More extensive systems of production continue to be practised in Africa, Australia, New Zealand and South America, for grazing species, and there is a strong public perception that more extensive management systems are synonymous with better welfare.

Seminal texts by authors including Harrison, Singer, Regan, Rollin, Webster et al, plus the UK Brambell report (cited in Appleby and Hughes, 1997), the concept of the "five freedoms" and changing consumer attitudes, have all had a significant impact, particularly in Europe and North America, on the attitudes to animal welfare of scientists, the public at large and, through them, politicians. Welfare aspects of animal agriculture, and associated consumer preference behaviour, have also attracted increasing attention from some agricultural economists (McInerney 1998, Harper 1998) and agricultural ethicists.

The Council of Europe has played a key role in developing standards for Europe and which are taken note of internationally. These standards are based on both scientific

evidence and practical experience and also emphasize the importance of the relationship between animal health and animal welfare.

It is helpful to have basic guidelines or rules to refer to when making decisions that may impact on an animal's welfare. Probably the most widely utilised set of guidelines is the five freedoms (Farm Animal Welfare Council 1993). These state that for an animal's welfare not to be compromised it must have: freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition; freedom from discomfort; freedom from pain, injury and disease; freedom to express normal behaviour; and, finally, freedom from fear and distress. Sometimes slight modifications are made to these basic freedoms (e.g. fear is sometimes omitted from the final freedom), however, they generally serve as a set of goals towards which animal owners and handlers should strive. The five freedoms have been used by many legislators and frequently appear as the basis upon which animal welfare codes and practices have been established.

There is an unfortunate tendency to underestimate the importance of animal health in relation to animal welfare. The prevention and control of disease in all species makes a major contribution to animal welfare and veterinarians, in general, and the OIE, in particular, play a vital role in this regard.

Adams (2001), in reviewing the publication "Livestock in 2020: The New Food Revolution" (Delgado, 1999) emphasises the opportunity for veterinarians "to act locally but think globally" about animal welfare. This joint publication of the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, the Food and Agriculture of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Livestock Research Institute in Nairobi provides detailed information on the dramatic increase in the world's consumption of food, derived from animals, over the last 30 years.

Expanding human populations, urbanisation and income growth are expected to continue, and even accelerate, the trend and Adams (2001) asks "is it time to rejuvenate the science of animal husbandry to ensure that animals are better protected?" The importance of knowledgeable and caring animal husbandry is recognized as an essential prerequisite to maximising animal welfare (Hemsworth, 1993).

Fraser (1999, 2001) has emphasised the importance of the linkage between animal ethics and animal welfare and the vital relationship, in terms of public and societal

opinion, between historical cultural attitudes to animals and their use in modern agricultural systems. He argues that there is an urgent need to create a new consensus regarding the use of animals in agriculture. The veterinary profession, at large, and the OIE, in particular, are well positioned to make an important contribution to this debate.

Animal welfare and international trade policy

The conclusion of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Uruguay Round, in 1994, and the establishment of the WTO, with its associated Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) agreements plus the Agreement on Agriculture, were seen to set the stage, and create a framework, for all member nations to reap the benefits of agricultural trade liberalisation. There has, however, been a growing concern, particularly amongst some non-governmental organisations (NGOs), (Bowles 2000; RSPCA 1998; RSPCA et al 1998; RSPCA & Eurogroup for Animal Welfare 1999; RSPCA 2000), that the WTO rules-based trading system does not adequately address consumer interests and that the credibility of, and public support for, the WTO is thus at risk. The NGOs involved believe that the outcome of the tuna/dolphin, shrimp/turtle and leghold trap issues support their views. These three specific cases essentially support the view that animal welfare considerations cannot be used as a trade impediment (RSPCA 1998). Bayvel (1993, 1996, 2000 and 2004) has reviewed the topic from both a New Zealand and international perspective.

There is no single international organisation with a standard setting role or a responsibility for the provision of expert advice on animal welfare, although a number of organisations and agencies have a significant interest in the area. The largest of these is the Council of Europe, which developed the convention on farm animals in 1976 and now has three other conventions on animal welfare relating to welfare during transport, welfare at slaughter and welfare of companion animals. The Council of Europe has over 40 member countries and the standards developed relate to European farm systems. By the late 1990s, there was growing support for the proposal that the OIE could be an appropriate, inter-governmental organisation with the necessary international standing and expertise to address animal welfare issues and seek agreement on international standards.

In parallel with the policy debate on animal welfare and international trade, important initiatives have been taken by some producers and retailers. A number of OIE member countries, including some European countries, Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Canada have also gained valuable experience in the role of Industry-led Quality Assurance programmes, in promoting animal welfare standards. This approach, underpinned by science-based national standards, provides an opportunity to benchmark animal welfare outcomes. It is preferred to, and seen to be a much more cost-effective option than, a prescriptive regulatory approach. These schemes have, undoubtedly, had a positive impact on animal welfare and have helped to directly address consumer concerns.

Animal welfare standards

Defining and assessing animal welfare has become the subject of a significant body of literature over the last two decades. The most commonly accepted definition is that, "the welfare of an individual animal is its state as regard its attempt to cope with its environment, with attempts to cope including the functioning of body repair systems, immunological defences, the physiological stress response and a variety of behavioural responses." (Broom, 1996).

The 1998 and 2001 European Directives on layer hens 99/74/EC (Anon 1999) and pigs 2001/88/EC, (Anon 2001) are both based on extensive scientific reviews conducted by the European Commission Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare. These Directives support the view that public perception does not necessarily equate to optimum animal welfare standards and, thus, both Directives continue to permit the use of (enriched and larger) cages for layer hens and confinement of sows one week pre-partum and four weeks post-mating.

As a matter of policy, the standards developed by the OIE follow the same science-based approach and draw on contemporary scientific consensus. To address the public perception issue, it is recommended, as advocated by Fraser (1999), that animal welfare policy and standards should also be complemented by robust ethical analysis. Blokhuis et al (2000) and MAFF (2001) further emphasise the important interaction between science and society.

Fraser (1999) emphasises the importance of both scientific and ethical inputs by stating,

"As it has unfolded to date, the debate has been disappointing intellectually, ethically, and politically: intellectually, because the debate has not resulted in a genuine understanding of how animal agriculture affects animals, the environment, and the good of the public; ethically, because the polemical nature of many of the accounts of animal agriculture has tended to polarise the debate and to prevent real ethical analysis of important issues; and politically, because this polarised debate has failed to create a climate of dialogue and consensus building. As a first step towards rectifying these problems, there is an urgent need for scientists and ethicists to avoid simply aligning themselves with advocacy positions and instead to provide knowledgeable research and analysis of the issues." These sentiments, and this strategic approach, are highly relevant to ensure that the OIE is to be both politically and publicly credible in the area of animal welfare.

OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health)

Since its establishment in 1924, the OIE has made a major indirect contribution to animal welfare, at a global level, via the organisation's role in epizootic disease control. The OIE animal health code includes a chapter on minimum animal welfare standards for trade and a standard setting role has also been played in respect of animal transportation. IN 1994, the publication "Animal Welfare and Veterinary Services" was included I the OIE Scientific and Technical Review Series (Moss 1994) and provides a valuable State Veterinary Service perspective on animal welfare capability and specific animal welfare issues.

In drawing up its strategic plan for the period 2001 to 2005, animal welfare and food safety were identified as two areas for future OIE involvement and these were formally accepted as strategic initiatives at the 2001 OIE General Session meeting. An international expert group was established to provide specific recommendations on the nature and scope of the OIE animal welfare role. The expert group's recommendations were reviewed and adopted, as Resolution No. XIV, at the May 2002 OIE General Session meeting. A permanent international working group was established and met for the first time in October 2002.

The working group drafted a mission statement plus policies and guiding principles, and reviewed the scope, drafted terms of reference and identified potential members for four separate ad-hoc groups to address initial priority areas. Detailed annual work programmes were developed for 2003, 2004 and 2005. Resolutions XXVI were

adopted at the 2003 and 2004 General Session meetings and a successful Global Conference on Animal Welfare was held in Paris in February, 2004. At the 2005 OIE General Session, four sets of animal welfare guidelines were adopted unanimously by all 167 OIE member countries.

The 2005 General Session also supported the commencement of work in the following new areas:

- Aquatic animal welfare
- Laboratory animal welfare
- Wildlife welfare
- Stray dog control
- Production animal housing

Good progress has, subsequently, been made in all five areas with *ad hoc* groups having already produced recommendations on aquatic animal welfare and a draft report on stray dog control. A laboratory animal ad hoc group met in December 2007 and an ad hoc group on production animals in April 2008.

Animal welfare has also received emphasis in the OIE fourth strategic plan for the period 2006-2010 and will be an ongoing core function for the OIE in the years ahead.

In addition to the specific activities and achievements detailed in the OIE work programme, a number of other ancillary and related activities, have contributed directly, and indirectly, to the progress made by the OIE in its international animal welfare leadership role. These include:

- Funding from the European Commission, via the OIE's Animal Health and Welfare Fund, has supported important training activities in the areas of humane slaughter and killing for disease control purposes.
- Both the Centre for Epidemiology, Food Safety and Veterinary Training in Teramo, Italy and the Centre for Animal Welfare Science and Bioethical Analysis at Massey University in New Zealand have been recognised as OIE Animal Welfare Collaborating Centres.

- “Animal Welfare: Global Issues, Trends and Challenges” was published in 2005 in the OIE Scientific and Technical Review Series and includes 26 invited papers from recognised international experts covering a full range of animal welfare topics.
- Through its financial lending arm the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank has also made an important contribution to raising awareness of animal welfare internationally through the publication: “Good Practice Note: Creating Business Opportunity through Improved Animal Welfare Animal Welfare in Livestock Operations.”
- A second OIE Global Conference on Animal Welfare will be held in Cairo, Egypt in October 2008 with the theme “Implementing the OIE Animal Welfare Standards.”
- Publication of “The Scientific Assessment and Management of Animal Pain” in the OIE Technical Series in October, 2008.
- Development and finalisation during October, 2008 of a Regional Animal Welfare Strategy for the Asia, Far East and Oceania OIE Region.

Conclusions

Animal welfare is a complex, multi-faceted public policy issue which includes important ethical, economic and political dimensions. There is a real concern, in some quarters, that its recognition as an international trade policy issue is sought for "trade protectionism", rather than "animal protection" reasons. A strategic approach underpinned by science-based policy and standards and an incremental approach to animal welfare change management (Mellor and Stafford, 2001) helps, however, to directly address such concerns.

The need for international leadership in respect of animal welfare policy and standards has been evident for some time and is likely to be an expanding core role for the OIE in the decades ahead. International scientific and professional organisations such as the International Society for Applied Ethology (ISAE), World Veterinary Association (WVA) and the Commonwealth Veterinary Association (CVA) have confirmed their interest in working closely with the OIE, as have international industry and animal welfare advocacy organisations. Other organisations such as the FAO and World Bank are also taking an interest in animal welfare and in March, 2003, the Government of the Philippines hosted an inter-governmental meeting attended by 25 countries to discuss the possible development of a United Nations Declaration on Animal Welfare.

There is also, of course, a significant increase in interest in animal welfare at University under-graduate and post-graduate level and the establishment of Animal Welfare Chairs in Universities in Canada, the USA, the EU and New Zealand and Australia, over the last few decades, has provided academic and research direction to this interest. Progress in the area of animal welfare will, of course, be a case of "evolution not revolution" based on the principle of incremental change management. It is vitally important that all such changes be science-based and validated, be implemented over realistic time frames and take account of economic and cultural factors.

Implementation of the agreed OIE strategic initiative on animal welfare presents significant challenges to ensure identification of priorities, an appropriate focus and effective use of resources. The approach adopted must recognise the intense interest of non-governmental organisations, the public and politicians and the significant scientific contribution, which can be made by non-veterinarians. In its third and fourth strategic plans the OIE has given increased priority, and allocated additional resources, to increasing its public profile and communication effectiveness. This initiative is particularly relevant to any future enhanced animal welfare role, as all forms of media take an active, ongoing interest in animal welfare issues.

In addition to full ownership of, and "buy-in" to, OIE's animal welfare role by its 172 member countries, it is considered strategically and politically important that other stakeholder groups, including industry groups, NGOs and the WTO, are also fully supportive of this role. The major international conference held in February 2004, thus, included all stakeholder groups. Proceedings are available at http://www.oie.int/eng/publicat/en_conferences.htm?e1d11

The progress made by the OIE, to date, in relation to international animal welfare leadership is, by any standards, impressive. The future OIE modus operandi will be characterised by a commitment to communication, consultation, continuous improvement and incremental change, as part of a long-term 'journey', rather than any expectation of reaching a short to medium-term 'destination'.

The notion of approaching animal welfare change management on a truly global, rather than a national basis, represents a significant paradigm shift. The support, goodwill and esprit de corps so evident during the 2004 global conference, and subsequently, bodes well for the future.

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