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# PUBLIC ISSUES AND CONCERNS

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## Introduction

The workgroup on public issues and concerns was charged with the responsibility of discussing the basis for concern and awareness about food animal well-being among members of the general public. The public policy process was also included in the scope of issues addressed by this group. The group arrived at six recommendations for action. They are to:

- 1) organize a group charged with the responsibility to propose a comprehensive public statement of concerns or issues associated with food animal well-being;
- 2) undertake a program to develop educational materials and curricula on food animal well-being;
- 3) conduct research that will support the development of alternative policies and methods of production;
- 4) encourage producer groups to develop internal procedures for establishing guidelines and for ensuring compliance;
- 5) create sources of funding dedicated to research and program development on food animal well-being; and
- 6) form an integrated industry effort to promote public understanding of animal agriculture.

This report includes in-depth discussion of each of these six recommendations, as well as a general summary of items discussed during the workgroup sessions.

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## Recommendation 1: Definition of the Issue

The workgroup acknowledged that the public concerns and policy issues associated with animal well-being are considerably more complex than is usually appreciated. What is needed is a single source of information that can serve as a launching pad for more detailed dialogue, analysis, and research. In accordance with this need, the group recommends a systematic effort to create and disseminate a document that defines the issues, identifies the affected parties (the various publics with interests in the animal well-being issue), and indicates what is and is not known about the concerns and perceptions of the issues by these publics. This task is conceived as occurring in three stages.

First, a task force should be organized. This group should identify the key elements of issues and should indicate where preliminary research is needed to undertake a systematic definition of these issues. In particular, the workgroup felt that there should be sophisticated research undertaken to identify and evaluate current public attitudes and concerns. The workgroup felt that current surveys and published materials do not assess public attitudes at a level of detail that permits knowledgeable generalization. The task force should not rely solely on sources currently available for assessing public attitudes, but should undertake at least preliminary research on attitudes, awareness, and concern on the part of multiple segments of society, including animal protection advocates, rural non-farm and urban populations, as well as the general public.

Having undertaken this research, the task force should produce a white paper, basebook, report, or other document that can serve as a common focal point for future discussion of the public issues associated with animal well-being. This report should be sophisticated, but should be addressed to the broad audience of interested parties identified in the preliminary investigations. The group noted that the interplay of concerns is complex. Parties interested in such diverse areas as the environment, biotechnology, small farms, rural communities, sustainable agriculture, and food safety can have a potential interest in food animal well-being. The document should thus reflect some effort to identify the issues of primary interest with respect to the wide array of other issues with which they are mixed.

Finally, the publication of the document should be followed up with an organized effort to promote a wide discussion and dialogue on issues and concerns. The document itself can serve as the starting point for these discussions. However, groups of producers, public interest advocates, government officials, and academics should be convened and charged with interpreting proposals and drafting recommendations for addressing the concerns identified. This effort should be organized around a series of meetings or workshops at which the report is presented and at which groups have ample opportunity for dialogue. Efforts should be made to ensure that a record of concerns and reactions is captured for future reference.

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## **Recommendation 2: Education**

The workgroup devoted a substantial amount of time to a discussion of education. There was a broad consensus that education is needed and that this education is less a matter of correcting misimpressions or addressing a deficit of factual knowledge than it is a matter of undertaking broad and deep efforts to develop the concepts and motivation to understand issues. Education should not be understood as public relations or as a one-way process in which “we” educate “them.” Rather, the current situation is seen as one in which fragmentary information is creating confusion on the part of virtually everyone. Educational programs are needed to create a broad base of shared knowledge about animal agriculture, animal needs, and about the values and attitudes held by various parties. With this general framework in mind, the workgroup identified three audiences to which education should be addressed.

First, there should be programs developed for animal producers and for the agricultural industry. These programs should provide information on a variety of topics, including what is known about public attitudes and concerns, as well as what is known about animal well-being and good husbandry itself.

Second, there should be educational materials produced for the general public. These might include books, pamphlets, and videotapes, but the workgroup stressed that every effort should be made to assure that these programs are credible. This means that they should present a balanced view of present practices, as well as opportunities for improving the well-being of food animals.

The third area received the greatest attention. It was noted that animal science departments or veterinary colleges only recently have begun to integrate animal welfare social and ethical concerns into their curricula. The workgroup endorsed the idea that agriculture and veterinary students should be systematically introduced to the issues of animal well-being, including bioethics, in their college courses. Furthermore, the group endorsed the idea of developing materials that would facilitate the inclusion of the issue into a wide variety of courses across the undergraduate curriculum. The group also expressed strong support for the development of materials appropriate for use in K-12 applications.

## **Recommendation 3: Policy and Production Alternatives**

The workgroup endorses the immediate commencement of research to support the development of new technology and policy options. In this connection, our workgroup noted the importance of research priorities identified by the workgroup on researchable issues but wished also to stress social science research that will be crucial to the support of alternatives. The following types of social science research have yet to be done but must be undertaken simultaneously with biological research.

- 1) **Research on productivity.** The impact of proposed policies or technologies should be assessed using economic productivity and policy models. This research should reflect the effects of commodity subsidies both for animal products and for animal feeds.
- 2) **Research on farm income, size, and scale.** There is some evidence that some groups associate animal well-being issues with the size and scale of the production unit. We should undertake research to examine possible links between well-being and these variables and determine the basis for beliefs in these connections.
- 3) **Research on trade.** Given the move toward regulation of animal well-being in the European Economic Community, it is important to undertake research on the evolution of rules in all parts of the world that might be important to U.S. international markets and impact trade.
- 4) **Research on markets.** Research should be undertaken to assess consumer reaction to food animal well-being initiatives and to identify opportunities for specialty markets.
- 5) **Research on public attitudes.** There should be continuing research on public attitudes and the political structure of interest groups affected by policy and by changes in technology.
- 6) **Research on bioethics.** There should be continuing support for bioethics research on the values and philosophical dimensions that affect food animal agriculture.

## **Recommendation 4: Industry Self-Governance**

The workgroup discussed and recognized the efforts of producer groups and industry toward developing guidelines for the care of food animals. It was the sense of the workgroup that efforts in this area are important for two reasons:

- 1) to avoid government intervention and mandated regulations and
- 2) to provide the public with documented assurance of producer commitment to appropriate animal care.

However, the workgroup expressed concern that producer groups must follow through with guideline development and also must develop strategies that will encourage compliance among all members of their respective producer groups.

## **Recommendation 5: Sources of Funding**

Although some funding has been provided in broadly defined areas related to animal well-being, there has not been a deliberate commitment toward providing funds for research directly related to the subject. Supporting the various recommendations of this workgroup will require specific commitments from public and private resources. The workgroup recommends to public funding sources,

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such as USDA and Agricultural Experiment Stations, that funding be provided in the areas specifically identified in this conference by the research priorities workgroup. In addition, appropriate research funds in the area of social science should be allocated to satisfy research priorities identified in recommendations 1 and 3.

## **Recommendation 6: Industry Public Education Efforts**

The workgroup recommends that an industry-wide effort be employed to promote an integrated picture of animal agriculture. Public, farmer, and animal interrelationships should be the focus of the educational effort. There is a need for the animal industries to develop public education materials that go beyond commodity endorsement and promotion.

## **Conclusion**

The six recommendations made by the workgroup were prioritized. Although all are considered important, recommendations 1, 2, and 3 were seen as immediate priorities, while 4, 5, and 6 were viewed as long-term efforts with, however, immediate funding needs (recommendation 5).

In addition, recommendation 1 was seen as critically important to establishing agendas to be pursued in the rest of the recommendations and of direct importance to policy makers and others affecting decisions on animal well-being.

Finally, it was the sense of the workgroup that government and academic administrators have only begun to recognize the importance of issues concerning animal well-being. A concerted effort should be made on the part of USDA, academic administrators, and other administrative entities to make commitments to this issue in both the short and long term.

## **Workgroup Members**

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