
IMPLICATIONS FOR GUIDELINES AND REGULATIONS

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Summary. Consensus of a broad-based, representative group of 21 people developed around two major priorities: 1) producers and the animal industries should self-govern programs to address animal well-being issues with the cooperation of all stakeholders, and 2) we must improve technology transfer, information exchange, communication, and coordination of programs through broad-based educational initiatives among all stakeholders on food animal well-being issues. Development of producer-owned and self-governed animal care assurance programs should be encouraged and are preferred to legislative mandates. Barriers to these priorities were recognized. However, these barriers may be minimized by: 1) creating and maintaining cooperative networks among all stakeholders; 2) establishing a system to disseminate information concerning the entire food chain in usable formats; and 3) identifying and capturing current programs and resources to coordinate a positive approach to educational efforts for food animal well-being issues for all stakeholders and communities.

Introduction

The workgroup on guidelines and regulations was an eclectic group with diverse viewpoints and representation, including producers, commodity group representatives, members of humane organizations, educators, extension specialists, foreign representatives, and federal regulatory officials. To take advantage of this diversity, a consensus-building process was developed. Three break-out groups were formed to address issues and priorities as a whole and later to develop specific recommendations related to top priority issues. The workgroup identified two priority areas for which recommendations are presented below.

Priority 1: Establishment and Maintenance of Guidelines, Base Standards, and Regulations

Guidelines and base standards are by definition voluntary. Acceptable standards of husbandry ought to be developed by producer/industry organizations, and compliance should be imposed through producer/industry

self-regulation. Governmental regulations, which are imposed by legislative mandates, ought to be minimized but should continue to be used in areas of special public concern related to humane treatment and slaughter, animal cruelty, etc.

In order to establish workable animal well-being guidelines, base (or generic) standards, as defined by consensus of producer/industry organizations, should receive input and scrutiny from all stakeholders (including consumers, animal protection/welfare advocates, scientific community, and government officials) to ensure that they are the minimum acceptable husbandry practices. These broad-based standards could then form the foundation for species-specific guidelines to be developed by the individual animal industries.

Each producer/industry group from farm through slaughter should refine the above broad-based standards to define, develop, implement, and enforce its own unique species- or commodity-related standards/guidelines. Here again, for wide public acceptance, species- or commodity-specific guidelines should be reviewed and evaluated by the major stakeholders (producer/industry, processors, animal health/well-being specialists, consumers, legislative representatives, government officials, and educators). These specific standards/guidelines should be evaluated using the following five criteria:

- 1) current moral and ethical values of the stakeholders;
- 2) up-to-date scientific and husbandry knowledge of the issues (Research in animal husbandry and humane slaughter practices are encouraged as necessary);
- 3) overall economic impacts of proposed standards/guidelines;
- 4) available technology to implement the guidelines in a reasonable and workable fashion; and
- 5) compatibility and consistency with current regulations mandated by legislation.

The species- or commodity-specific standards/guidelines from farm through slaughter should be science based (to the fullest extent possible) and consistent with good husbandry practices. The leadership for the development, maintenance, and imposition of these standards/guidelines should reside within the commodity/industry groups that they serve. These standards/guidelines should be flexible and changeable, being updated as new scientific information becomes available, and they should include information to address the important animal well-being issues from conception through slaughter.

Producer/Industry Animal Well-Being Programs using the specific industry standards/guidelines could be built on industry experiences with Quality Assurance Programs. As producer/industry well-being standards evolve, the guidelines can change as necessary. Peer and economic pressures as well as concern by the majority of livestock care-givers for improving animal well-being standards would contribute to effective and efficient self-regulation.

Individual producer/processor certification programs were suggested as an effective method of instituting self-regulation.

The management of such a self-governing program would involve continual evaluation of guidelines and base standards along with concurrent changes in legislatively mandated regulations that might occur. The workgroup concluded that, if producers and industry organizations develop self-governing programs to address the important animal well-being issues with the cooperation and assistance of all the stakeholders, legislative mandates and regulations will be avoided or minimized. However, where necessary, regulatory enforcement against animal cruelty should be supported.

Self-monitoring and self-regulation are preferable to legislative mandates. Furthermore, if the animal industries could be assured that developing and implementing self-imposed guidelines would avoid or lessen the proliferation of federal and state laws and regulations, it would be a great selling point for grassroots support by individual producers and industries. However, if society decides to impose new legal requirements pertaining to animal well-being in the future, existing producer/industry guidelines should be incorporated into any new regulations. Such regulations would thereby better reflect current producer/industry standards and would result in a more realistic level of requirements for compliance.

The individualized producer- or industry-initiated guidelines should be developed by broad-based task forces through the leadership of the producer/industry groups and all the major stakeholders. In addition, permanent standing committees should be established to review the guidelines on a regular basis. In addition to producer/industry membership, these standing committees should include representatives from the major stakeholders nominated by their peers to serve rotating terms.

Priority 2: Building Coalitions Through Communication, Technology Transfer, and Education

A means of exchanging information, enhancing communications, and developing an education initiative for food animal well-being that encompasses all stakeholders should be established. The scope of this initiative should include technology/information transfer and the development of appropriate educational programs, especially with respect to producer/industry guidelines for animal well-being. Special efforts are needed to develop linkages, networks, cooperative partnerships, and coalitions among the various stakeholders and should be given a high priority.

The formulation of an appropriate national information/technology transfer process might also involve establishing a national forum that would:

- 1) encourage grassroots participation;

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- 2) discuss and review existing and proposed producer/industry guidelines, base standards, regulations, and legislative mandates pertaining to food animal well-being;
 - 3) develop suggestions for updating existing producer/industry guidelines and base standards;
 - 4) develop recommendations for producer/industry certification programs (i.e., animal care assurance programs);
 - 5) involve all stakeholders in the process;
 - 6) develop dialogues among the producer/industry groups and all other stakeholders, including special interest groups; and
 - 7) establish a national clearinghouse for the dissemination of scientific and husbandry information developed on food animal well-being from U.S. and international sources. (It was recommended that the mission of the Animal Welfare Information Center of the USDA National Agriculture Library be expanded to include this activity.)

As an outcome from this conference, the group recommended that all stakeholders receive written results from this conference in a user-friendly format and tips for how to use the information from this conference and other meetings, with targeted messages being communicated to each stakeholder group.

Potential Obstacles to Addressing Guideline and Regulation Issues

Potential barriers and/or obstacles to addressing guideline and regulation issues were defined for both priority areas. They included:

1. producer participation (buy-in);
2. funding;
3. establishing credibility of the guidelines and forum;
4. obtaining positive media attention;
5. lack of scientific data to develop guidelines;
6. emotional issues;
7. legislative dependency (i.e., problems being addressed by Congressional mandates);
8. differing interpretations of guidelines, regulations, and varying legal implications;
9. logistics of the implementation of producer/industry guidelines; and

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10. leadership and logistics of developing the information, technology transfer, and coalition-building efforts among the various stakeholders.

Overall Comments and Recommendations

The participants in this workshop identified and discussed a large number of valuable and important elements related to the assigned subject title. The more important points are divided into the following seven consolidated areas for recommendations.

- 1) Voluntary, industry-generated animal care programs from farm through slaughter are preferred over regulations. Guidelines must be producer/industry defined, developed, implemented, and self-governed. Base (or generic) standards, representing a consensus of all stakeholders, should be defined as the minimum acceptable husbandry practices upon which species-specific guidelines and programs can be founded.
- 2) Species-specific, producer- or industry-initiated guidelines should have input from all the major stakeholders. Broad-based task forces could be formed. These guidelines should be evaluated on several important criteria, including current moral and ethical values of the stakeholders, current scientific knowledge and technology, economic factors, and compatibility with current regulations.
- 3) Educational initiatives and cooperative efforts must be implemented for all stakeholders. A broad-based national farm animal well-being forum could facilitate dissemination of educational materials for diverse groups and educational levels. This national forum must encourage grassroots participation of all stakeholders, provide a means to review guidelines, and enhance dialogue among all interested and affected parties. Information disseminated by this forum should be in “user-friendly” formats.
- 4) A clearinghouse must be established to centralize and disseminate national and international information produced by stakeholders. Many conferences, meetings, and symposia are held by different segments of the food animal industry and associated organizations. Informational materials, both audio and visual, are developed for target audiences which can be more effectively and efficiently used with minimal redundancy if processed through a clearinghouse.
- 5) Information must encompass the entire food producing system from farm to table. A breakdown of the capability for technology/information transfer from stakeholder to stakeholder could result in public perceptions of mistrust and misunderstanding of farm animal

well-being which would cause attempts at legislative correction. Workgroup participants strongly feel that appropriate guidelines for food animal related industries can be effective and sufficient to preclude invoking the legislative process.

- 6) Current programs and resources need to be captured and coordinated efforts made to more effectively take a positive approach to food animal well-being. There are many programs and resources devoted to food animal well-being. However, the efforts are somewhat fragmented and individualized. When these efforts and resources are identified and delineated, a coordinated course of action can be taken to provide a positive orientation to food animal well-being.
- 7) For a truly national effort to be linked and coordinated effectively, each animal industry must develop its appropriate coordinating structure with interactions among the various industries. It was suggested that a Forum for Farm Animal Well-Being be established to encompass national and international issues. The USDA inter-agency Animal Welfare Committee, along with the coordinators of this conference and national industry, humane associations, producer groups, and consumer, educator, and research organizations could provide leadership in establishing this Forum.

Workgroup Members

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