

---

# IMPLICATIONS FOR PRODUCTION AGRICULTURE AND AGRIBUSINESS

*Anne Banville*

*American Veal Association*

*Richard Reynnells*

*USDA/Extension Service*

## Introduction

The animal industries are beginning to see the full dimensions of animal well-being issues and are trying to fit the relevant aspects into proper perspective. We should not be talking so much about “sides” of the issues, but should be trying to address important issues. Maybe the animal industries together with the moderate animal activists groups can develop needed educational programs.

For the purposes of the cooperative activities discussed in this program, “moderate” animal activists are defined as: those who have developed and publicly stated their position and policy on animal well-being and utilization issues; who do not oppose the use of animals for food and fiber; and who are willing to defer excessive opposition to various current management procedures until conclusive scientific evidence concurs with their viewpoint. Such policy commitments by these activist groups are then a springboard for trust and cooperative programs.

What should an overall educational program on food animal well-being include? Involvement ought to extend beyond the general public to include everyone in the food animal production systems. Should we be allowing the public to visit farms? Can we expect them to react favorably? People probably will not remember what was said, but they will remember their instincts and feelings about animal care and comfort. Should programs include high school students? Legislators and their aides?

Commodity groups need to take the initiative in consumer education regarding management procedures, product promotion, and public policy determination. Production agriculture should also be taking a look at important things that affect them. Producers need to become involved in the important policy decisions that will shape their futures, such as BST. However, producers/industries must develop educational programs that are credible and based on scientific research. Producers and their organizations must take positions that are compatible with sound production practices and proper ethics.

As we talk about food animal well-being, we do not know how to grasp fully the entire bundle of issues. We need research on how to enhance animal well-being and how to implement improvements in existing operations. But how can we take advantage of new technologies in our existing operations and obtain the necessary and fair return for adopting this technology? Improving food animal

---

welfare will, at least in some instances, increase production costs. Certainly the consumers of animal products are stakeholders as costs are added to products, and they should have a voice in the cost of any trade-offs made. Consumers must be allowed to “vote” with their purchases rather than listen to vocal, well-connected persons of influence who prefer legislative mandates.

Finally, we need to establish agreement on a definition of what food animal welfare really is and on its implications to farmers and consumers. Are we really communicating? Do we need more dialogue among the stakeholders? Special issues that warrant discussion include: the economics of altering production systems; research needs; management of downer animals; food safety; and intensive versus extensive confinement production systems.

## **Problem—Information Being Disseminated to the Public Regarding Food Animal Well-Being**

### ***Issue Statement***

A problem exists with information that is being disseminated to public audiences (youth, general public, media, industry, opinion leaders, and decision makers) concerning food animal well-being and the public’s perceptions of that information.

### ***Recommendations***

A steering committee composed of producers, moderate animal welfare groups, and other stakeholders should be established to address this and other common concerns, and to implement a goal of joint educational programs to the audiences outlined above.

Suggested projects of the steering committee would include: 1) dialogue with teacher groups to determine current animal education programs and to evaluate program and information needs and 2) establishment of a group to review textbooks for factual accuracy and balance and to correspond with publishers concerning recommended texts.

This workgroup requests that conference organizers convey these recommendations to all member organizations of the Farm Animal Welfare Coalition (FWAC) and to all interested animal industry and protection groups. The workgroup further requests that conference organizers report accomplishments of our request back to conference participants in a timely fashion and in an appropriate manner.

### ***Obstacles***

Many factors may inhibit the success of cooperative arrangements; the primary consideration is trust, which is influenced by facts, paradigms, values, and leadership changes over time. Questions of credibility must be addressed to achieve the necessary understanding to begin successful cooperative programs. Extreme views contribute to the feelings of mistrust, and the exploitation of real issues or the creation of false issues by inciting fear are devastating when

---

building cooperative ventures. Hidden agendas are often incorrectly associated only with animal protection groups. In any group, there are some individuals who engage in activities that are not justified or that create a bad image. When farmers create the negative example, furthermore, it is often blown out of proportion and presented as the norm by activist groups.

Human diversity in a pluralistic society allows everyone to think differently, which may contribute to misunderstanding and mistrust if divergent opinions are forced on others. Such situations often result in a protectionist mentality whereby no progress is made. An open-minded approach is required to resolve food animal well-being questions and to create opportunities for cooperation.

We have a lack of knowledge regarding many welfare issues and, in fact, have not come to full agreement on the meaning of the term “well-being.” This situation may contribute to a feeling of complacency on the part of industry personnel. More consideration must be given to the costs associated with any optional management changes being demanded by activists to replace current practices with the stated intent of fostering animal well-being. Furthermore, food safety considerations should be factored into such a cost analysis.

The above obstacles are manageable, if the animal industries develop an array of properly designed animal systems that are above reproach. Well-designed animal systems may be one of the best ways to improve animal well-being and to counter public concerns about well-being. For example, regarding safety considerations, is animal production a separate industry or is it part of the food industry? Could models of systems be used from other countries whereby all downer cows automatically are euthanized and sent to the rendering plant? In these cases, consideration must also be given to the different economic incentives of dairy versus pork producers. And there is the traditional “not my problem” attitude when some other industry is being treated as the scapegoat.

Scapegoating and turf battles (egos, institutional pride) must be avoided within and between agricultural interest groups. Grassroots producer opinions and needs should be reflected in the opinions espoused by national or regional organizational leadership. To date, a key component of a cooperative effort has been missing—effective communication. We must communicate and agree on what the facts are, so that all animal agriculture groups are working from a common information base. For example, protectionist groups feel that no one is listening; they need linkages to the agricultural community. And producers remember historical situations where they were unfairly characterized by protectionist groups. Cooperative efforts between animal protectionists and agriculturists must be carefully crafted to ensure a sincere commonality of interests that generates trust.

A very emotional area of mistrust for producers is the attempt by some animal protectionist or rights groups to indoctrinate the youth of this country through teachers supportive of their philosophies or the widespread distribution of their materials to school libraries. In addition, some textbooks carry the animal rights message either covertly or overtly. We all need to be proactive rather than reactive in all aspects of damage control.

---

## ***General Comments/Solutions***

These general comments reflect statements that were made to describe and deal with obstacles. Solutions are implied in both the obstacle and general statement sections. It was felt that by honestly addressing problem situations, solutions can be achieved. The question was asked, "What is the incentive for animal protectionists and the food animal industries to enter into a cooperative arrangement?" The incentive is that, by cooperating, their voices will be heard and they will be seen as being progressive and caring parties. In this way, they can assume their leadership responsibilities, obtain future recognition as leaders, and ensure their potential for influencing future policies and programs.

In cooperative programs, third parties, such as the government or universities, are needed to act as unbiased or neutral contributors to the joint activities.

There was considerable concern about how young children are exposed to material and about how in some cases these children become emotional "ping-pong balls" tossed from side to side by information provided by groups on both sides of animal welfare issues. There was agreement that no groups should provide philosophically slanted materials to young and impressionable children. Thus, there is a need for both sides to work together to provide proper factual information to youth.

A recommendation was made to meet with a teachers' group to find out if subtle propaganda is a common problem and, if so, to obtain guidance about handling the situation. It was felt that some textbook materials in the elementary grades are slanted toward animal welfare/rights, sometimes even to the point of advocacy of vegetarianism.

The real value of this first priority recommendation would be the establishment of credibility among all organizations involved in the well-being issues. We need to bring these groups together to see what common ground exists.

## ***Summary***

Considerable misinformation related to the impact of production practices on animal well-being is being disseminated to the general public and especially to school children. We recommend that an objective group of moderate animal production and protection advocates be organized to develop a balanced, truthful, and accurate presentation of information for the public and youth. Only in recent years has the agricultural community placed educational materials in schools, as a matter of self defense. While in the past a lack of trust on this initiative may have been legitimate and warranted by many producers, advances in trust and credibility are the keys to achieving progress in cooperative efforts.

---

## **Problem—In Certain Instances, Animal Well-Being May Be Compromised in Today’s Food Animal Production Systems**

### ***Issue Statement***

Action is needed in instances where animal well-being is being compromised in production systems.

### ***Recommendations***

Establishment of a steering committee comprised of food animal producers, moderate animal activist groups (as defined in the opening section of this report), and other stakeholders is suggested to address this common concern. This steering group would: 1) identify problem areas requiring action, 2) identify problem areas requiring research, and 3) recommend appropriate actions.

This workgroup requests that the conference organizers convey these recommendations to all member organizations of the Farm Animal Welfare Coalition (FAWC) and to all interested animal industry and protection groups. The workgroup further requests the conference organizers to report accomplishments of this request to conference participants in a timely fashion and in an appropriate manner.

### ***Obstacles***

Instances of animal well-being problems in food production and processing systems can occur for a variety of reasons.

- At the production level, it can be due to a lack of alternative management procedures. There is a lack of new information reaching producers about improving animal well-being. Untrained animal handlers, uneducated producers, and/or bad management practices can create problems. Sometimes, economic considerations may result in compromises having an undetermined effect on well-being.
- Within the industries, there are no well-established Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) or Total Quality Management (TQM) approaches aimed at preventing well-being problems from the beginning.
- Within current scientific efforts, there is a lack of mission-oriented, coordinated, multidisciplinary research to define and measure food animal “well-being.”
- At the public level, differences of opinion exist as to definitions of animal well-being. Often a lack of understanding of animal handling and biology prevails, and isolated instances of cruelty or abuse are portrayed to the public as normal production practices.

---

## ***General Comments/Solutions***

This problem is best dealt with through a multidisciplinary team approach including producers, moderate animal protection groups, government, scientists, public policy resources, and other stakeholders. This team should focus on identifying areas where compromised food animal well-being is occurring. The team should define what is acceptable practice and recommend actions, such as worker education for personnel regarding the proper handling of animals in livestock production systems. The team should also identify researchable areas to aid in establishing ground rules about what is “acceptable” within the industry. Furthermore, they should develop funding sources for research and recommend ideas for improved communication and technology transfer.

Regarding whether voluntary or mandatory standards should be used in these solutions, the following statements and suggestions were made.

- 1) Voluntary regulations and programs have been effective (National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP); Brucellosis; quality assurance; etc.).
- 2) Local laws exist that may cover some areas.
- 3) The need for self-monitoring by the industry to assure compliance should be considered.

## ***Summary***

It was generally recognized that animal well-being may be compromised in certain instances in today’s food animal systems and that these problem areas should be identified and addressed. Presently, there exists a lack of scientific data and economic information on current and, especially, alternative management practices. A coordinated, multidisciplinary research effort is needed to define and address these problems. However, an incentive exists on the part of producers, government, protectionists, and other stakeholders to seek solutions. Therefore, a group of “primary stakeholders,” i.e., producers and moderate animal protectionists together with other involved parties, should be identified and formed into a team. This team should work together to identify problem areas, focusing both on areas for action and on areas where research is needed. They should recommend appropriate steps to be taken in each area of food animal well-being concern.

## **Problem—What Researchable Opportunities for Food Animal Well-Being Exist Regarding Possible Changes in Production Systems?**

### ***Issue Statement***

The workgroup had very limited time to devote to the topic of identifying the critical researchable problems that need to be solved for animal production

---

agriculture. However, three broad categories of research were suggested as important and are listed below:

- 1) Optimum biological functioning and its relationship to well-being.
- 2) Impact of negative experiences/suffering (short and long term) on well-being.
- 3) Impact of contentment and other positive experiences on well-being.

### ***Recommendations***

It is recommended that the research suggestions outlined above be added to the research priorities established by the workgroup on researchable problems and priorities.

### ***Summary***

Research studies related to animal well-being in current production systems/practices and in alternative systems/practices are considered important for the continued development of economically viable production systems that are socially acceptable. Suggestions were made about important research categories, and it was recommended that, at future forums, these research opportunities be given a high priority for discussion by producer groups.

### **Workgroup Members**

Ann Banville (Co-Chair)	Monty Montgomery
Kirk Clark	Anthony Pescatore
James Craig	Edward Price
Eddie Creighton	Richard Reynnells (Co-Chair)
Stanley Curtis	Lew Runnels
John Froseth	Amelia Tarzi
Bob Hale	H. Leon Thacker
John Hardin	Gary Weber
Tom Hartsock	Mike Westendorf
Dan Lybrook (Facilitator)	Julia Wilder
D. A. McMartin	

