

# Legislation & Regulation

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## **UK Agriculture Committee Welfare Recommendations**

The recently published first report of the House of Commons Agriculture Committee on animal welfare contains several notable recommendations to the government of the U.K. on the housing and rearing of veal calves, pigs and poultry.

Proceeding from the conclusions reached by the Brambell Committee in 1965 on the requirements of farm animals, the Agriculture Committee concentrated its investigation on the rearing of veal calves in crates, the practice of closely confining pregnant sows and the keeping of laying hens in battery cages. In a statement to the press dated 23 July 1981, the Chairman outlined the Committee's approach to the investigation, emphasizing its rejection of the notion that productivity is an adequate index of welfare, its careful evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of both intensive and extensive systems of husbandry and its constant sensitivity to the possible economic consequences of suggested reforms. On this last point, the Chairman made it equally clear that economic considerations did not reign supreme in the judgments of the Committee, but were one of several important factors in its decision-making process. The recommendations themselves are temperate with respect to economic impact; they provide for implementation of changes over a gradual (but definite) period of time and urge cooperation of the entire European Community to protect U.K. producers from unfair competition with countries that may have less restrictive standards for farm animal welfare. The Chairman also noted in his statement to the press that the Committee did not accept the idea that systems or practices which save labor are always desirable, restating the

report's contention (paragraph 48) that "it is at least possible in today's circumstances that less dependence on energy and more on labor may on both counts have considerable advantages."

The Committee made five major recommendations regarding veal calves: 1) The Minister of Agriculture should seek European Community agreement to measures which will bring an early end to the rearing of veal calves in crates, and is asked to report his progress in January 1982; 2) the Minister should try to convince consumers of the advantages of veal from loose-housed calves and should encourage labelling of the product indicating method of production; 3) no grants of any kind should be made to facilitate production of veal from calves kept in crates; 4) the revised Code of Recommendations should strongly discourage crate-rearing and prescribe pens that allow calves freedom of movement and have bedded floors; 5) it should be provided by Regulation that all calves be given access to solid feed after the age of two weeks.

For pigs, the Committee recommends that efforts be made to develop practical and economical alternatives which would allow for phasing out of the close confinement of pregnant sows, that government support this research and that no grants be given to producers using close-confinement methods. Further, the Code of Recommendations should state that pigs housed indoors have access to a bedded area and that efforts be made to relieve the frustration and boredom of stalled and tethered sows. Pigs should not be kept in total darkness. Tail docking, when unavoidable, should be performed by a veterinarian or specially-skilled operator only. The welfare of early-weaned piglets and alternatives to the currently most acceptable methods of housing farrowing

sows indoors with warm creep areas for piglets should be subjects for further research. Finally, a ban on castration, except for veterinary reasons, should be sought within the European Community and imports from sources not adhering to the ban prohibited.

Another major recommendation involving the entire European Community (EC) asks for a statement of intention that in approximately five years, egg production will not include the use of battery cages *in their present form* (our emphasis). Further, research should continue into alternative housing systems and in the meantime, the Minister should seek EC agreement to a minimum standard for battery cages of 750 sq cm per adult bird. The Committee proposes that a Regulation be written to prohibit beak-trimming except when it would be in the animal's interest and then only under veterinary supervision. The practice of withholding food and water from birds for more than 24 hours should be discontinued.

The philosophy behind these recommendations, and the more general ones urging that the U.K. take a leading role in improving farm animal welfare, that state inspections be stepped up and that the Farm Animal Welfare Council play a bigger part in government research programs, was made explicit by the Chairman in his statement to the press: "We have tried, in short, to be realistic. We respect the views of those who would put welfare unconditionally first whatever the consequences, but we cannot go all the way with them. Neither, though, can we go along with the witness who told us uncompromisingly that consumers should not "have to pay higher prices for happy hens." Above all, we do not accept that a practice should be allowed until it can be scientifically proved beyond all doubt to cause suffering. That would make indefinite delay too easy. We have tried to strike a balance. We say firmly that where doubt exists the benefit of that doubt should go to the animals."

The full report, entitled *Animal Wel-*

*fare in Poultry, Pig and Veal Production* (House of Commons Paper 406-I), is available for £4.90 from Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, UK.

### **Bill to Ban Decompression in Pennsylvania**

Senator J. Doyle Corman of Pennsylvania (R.-34th district) is introducing a bill which would ban the use of the high-altitude decompression chamber in that state. This method of euthanasia for dogs and cats, heavily criticized as impractical and inhumane (see *Int J Stud Anim Prob* 1(2):139-140, 1980), has already been banned in the following nineteen states: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and Wyoming.

Trans-Species Unlimited, an animal rights organization in State College, Pennsylvania, initiated the campaign to ban the decompression chamber and drew up the bill which would effect the ban and regulate the use of alternative methods, *i.e.*, sodium pentobarbital injection or carbon monoxide poisoning. According to the organization's president, George P. Cave, a survey conducted by Trans-Species Unlimited of all shelters in Pennsylvania revealed that sodium pentobarbital injection is already the most widely used method of euthanasia. The bill gives preference to this method as the most humane and specifies that all puppies and kittens under six weeks of age be euthanized only by injection of sodium pentobarbital. The bill further states that only a licensed veterinarian or technician certified as competent by a licensed veterinarian may administer the drug. If carbon monoxide is to be used, it must either be supplied from cylinders, or if from another source such as an automobile engine, cooled and filtered prior to administration.