The Ministry of Agriculture's Involvement with Animal Welfare

Roy Moss

British Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

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philosophers, the animal welfare lobbyist, or the managers of corporate agribusi-
ness. Yet such familiarity with the object of concern does not necessarily imply
that other sectors of society should have little or no part in trying to resolve the
larger ethical questions of animal exploitation. Animal Lib cannot have all the
answers, but that does not preclude its ability to serve as a societal watchdog.
In order to have maximum impact, however, its efforts must be backed up by data
from applied animal welfare science as well as a thorough understanding of the
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The following is excerpted from a paper presented by Mr. Moss, Regional Veterinary Officer in the British Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, at the British Veterinary Association Annual Con-
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Keeping livestock healthy is primarily the responsibility of owners. Indeed, if
they did not do so they would certainly not make a profit. Advice on the preven-
tion, treatment and possible cure of disease is the responsibility of the veterinary
surgeon. Prevention of physical damage to animals and their adoption of abnor-
amal behavior caused by confinement which prevents them from exercising their
inherited behavioral patterns is the joint responsibility of the ethologist, the tech-
nologist who designs the confinement system and ancillary equipment, the live-
stock husbandry specialist, the veterinary surgeon and the owner. It society also
decides that there is need for enforcement of measures to make such responsi-
bilities compulsory, then it is for governments to make the political decision to
do so and to enact legislation on animal protection.

Following consideration of the report of the Brambell Committee, the British
government in 1968 took powers under Part I of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous
Provisions) Act 1968 to prevent the infliction of unnecessary pain or unnecessary
distress to livestock on agricultural land; to make regulations with respect to the
welfare of such livestock where such a course was considered appropriate; and to
prepare codes of recommendations for the welfare of livestock and to “spend such
sums as he (the Minister) thinks fit on the giving of advice, free of charge, to per-
sons concerned with livestock on matters relating to the welfare of livestock.”

Thus it was that the State Veterinary Service (SVS) was given responsibilities
for the surveillance of the welfare of livestock kept for farming purposes.

In addition to economic pressures, the virtual eradication of such diseases
as tuberculosis and the complete eradication of others, e.g., swine fever, has en-
couraged livestock owners to invest with greater confidence in larger individual
livestock units or complexes of such units. These intensive systems are
characterized by more animals per unit, less space per animal and mechanical
equipment replacing some of the personnel attending to the animals. One man is
thus enabled to look after very many animals. We must never forget the impor-
tance of that man, the stockman. His competence with and sympathy for his live-
stock is crucial for their well being. Paradoxically that very confidence to enlarge
has meant that today the size of individual units with high stocking densities
under systems of intensive management presents problems of entirely different
dimensions than in the past in both the disease and welfare context.

There are aspects of certain husbandry systems which to some observers
come very close to the dividing line between necessary pain and distress and that
which can be described as unnecessary, if the infliction of pain and distress can
ever be described as wholly necessary except in very well defined circumstances.
It is in this area that most of the problems for the SVS arise, particularly in the de-
determination of whether or not unnecessary pain or distress is being caused.

The philosophy of the SVS approach to livestock inspection is two-fold. First,
we believe that animal welfare is inseparable from the majority, if not all, of our
work with domestic farm livestock. Indeed as veterinary surgeons, we take an
oath “that my constant endeavor will be to the welfare of animals committed to
my care.” Second, we believe that prosecution under the 1968 Act should be used
as a last resort when all else has failed. That is why since 1968 there have been
few prosecutions. We try first of all to be advisers and in advising we seek the
help of the owner’s own veterinary surgeon and other colleagues in the
Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS) such as the environmen-
tal specialists, the nutritionists, and the surveyors, all of whom are always willing
to cooperate.

The specific welfare content of our efforts to achieve these objectives can
be divided into two separate parts:

i. “Police” action which is taken in response to the discovery of adverse
welfare conditions found at routine inspections or following the inves-
tigation of complaints;

ii. The promotion of positive health which can, I believe, be considered
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to be the study of the relationship between particular systems of ani-
mal husbandry and management standards and the need to improve
It is not just in Great Britain that such interest is being taken in the welfare of livestock and in intensive husbandry systems. Within the Council of Europe, the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes, applies to the keeping, care and housing of all domestic farm animals, and in particular to animals in modern intensive stock farming systems. This Convention has been ratified by a number of member countries including the UK, and a common approach by the European Economic Community countries is expected.

Articles 3 and 4 of the Convention state: "environmental conditions shall conform to the animals' physiological and ethological needs in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge." That must always be our aim.

**NSMR: Its Image, Direction and Future**

J. Russell Lindsey

The following speech was presented by Dr. Lindsey, Chairman of the University of Alabama Department of Comparative Medicine, at the Annual Board Meeting of the National Society for Medical Research (NSMR), Chicago, Illinois, November 16, 1979.

I would like to begin by stating two fundamental beliefs which have served as guiding principles throughout my professional career:

1. I am absolutely committed to the principle that animal research is in the best interest of both man and animals. (I have had the unusual experience of observing some of the earliest research on the defibrillator done in animals, and later seeing this instrument used to prolong my father's life by eight years. Similarly, I have seen light years of progress in medical care for animals since I graduated from veterinary school twenty years ago.)

2. I am equally committed to the principle that all animals used in research should be treated humanely throughout the research process. (Some people erroneously believe that a majority of animal research projects involve pain and suffering. I know from personal experience that when trained professionals are willing to invest the time, effort and ingenuity, most legitimate research objectives can be accomplished without pain and suffering.)

Now to the topic at hand, the 'image, direction and future' of NSMR. It seems to me that the organization's present image can be appreciated only as
(or maintain) productivity. However, before we can hope to satisfactorily discharge these responsibilities to both the animal and the agricultural industry, thereby promoting and maintaining a healthy profitable livestock enterprise on the farm, we need continuously to seek information on the range of normal behavior in all the species of domesticated farm livestock so that we can advise on the design of systems, particularly intensive systems, that will not lead to stress, frustration, or abnormal behavior, for this not only antagonizes certain sections of the general public but also leads to predisposition to disease and to loss in productivity and profitability.

In making these evaluations let us not forget the recommendations of the Brambell Committee which said quite categorically that animals should be provided with a husbandry system appropriate to their health and behavioral needs. The Brambell Committee also recognized that each system of husbandry has its own hazards which must be evaluated and in that statement they included systems of extensive husbandry. The Committee also believed that if the above principles were applied to intensive husbandry methods the use of such methods should not in themselves be regarded as objectionable and may even offer benefit to the animals.

Careful observation is a basic and most important tool of our discipline. Knowledge of the range of normal behavior within our domesticated farm livestock species has many gaps. I would like to think that all of us who visit farms on a regular basis or who undertake projects with livestock could record basic aspects of behavior so that the bank of information is increased, thereby improving the quality of the advice that can be given.

More information allows more meaningful advice to be given to Ministers through the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (FAWAC), which may involve a recommendation to amend parts of the Welfare Codes of Practice. More information allows our colleagues who are daily concerned with this work on the farm to be better briefed. More information allows consideration to be given to setting up and monitoring husbandry systems which can be designed to more closely match the most up-to-date knowledge of the behavioral needs of the animals concerned yet still provide satisfactory returns to the producer.

In the State Veterinary Service, with the cooperation of colleagues in other services of ADAS, we try to monitor all relevant experimental and development projects both inside and outside the Ministry in order to ensure compliance with the welfare codes of practice and any other statutory requirements, and consider if, with minor adjustments to the experiment or development protocol, subsequent results could be improved insofar as welfare content is concerned. The SVS also endeavors to ensure that the results of experimental and development projects which have or could have welfare implications are passed rapidly to all our veterinary and husbandry colleagues, to seek out and support new development projects and to act as a liaison between the FAWAC and research organizations.

We are continuously considering how we can more efficiently retrieve and disseminate information. Currently we are looking at ways and means of obtaining more information on the various husbandry systems for real production, and have set up a small observational study on the transport of pigs.

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