Enlarging Our Effectiveness

Among the many issues currently addressed by The HSUS and other animal-activist organizations, none is so volatile as that involving the use of animals for biomedical research and various testing procedures. Although the reasons for this controversy are many and varied, foremost among them is the inherent difficulty society has had in making decisions concerning animal welfare and human health. There has been a tendency to pit one against the other as though the two could not coexist. This has led to a perceived dichotomy and adversarial relationship between the scientific and animal-protection communities. Yet, it is our contention that animal-protection organizations can and should have a positive impact on the scientific community by serving as a stimulus for change in that direction, as has been acknowledged by both the animal-protection and scientific communities. Another of these changes involves the development of alternatives to the use of animals that may be superior to and less costly than the animal-dependent methods they replace.

The HSUS, in an attempt better to focus its efforts and energies in seeking to further the refinement, reduction, and replacement of animals used for research, has recently created a Scientific Advisory Council, composed of physicians, psychologists, veterinarians, and other scientists. This council, while in no way responsible for determining HSUS policy or practice regarding this or other scientific issues, has already been most helpful in furthering our efforts on behalf of animals.

The chairman of this council is Dr. David Webers, a noted neurologist and academic professor who also serves on the board of directors of The HSUS. In his article "Healing Society's Relationship with Animals," found on page 26 of this issue, Dr. Webers makes the case that, although "there are distinct and major differences between humans and other animals" there is also "a considerable amount of evidence to suggest, even by human definitions, that the most important and enduring element in humans and animals may be those elements which differ the least." He then concludes that "humankind's superior intelligence and capacity for making moral judgments does not confer upon us the right to exploit other species (or for that matter other humans with lesser intellectual capacity), but rather a responsibility to show compassion for them and assist them."

In another article, found on page 19, Robert Welborn, a distinguished attorney and member of the HSUS board of directors, describes his experience as a member of the Institutional Animal Committee of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. Having resigned from the committee relatively recently, Mr. Welborn has long agonized over the moral justification for the infliction of suffering on animals for the benefit of humans and has concluded that "if animals are to be used for these purposes, certainly it must be with respect, compassion, and gratitude, knowing that these are sentient creatures experiencing pain and stress for assumed human benefit."

The HSUS is grateful for these dedicated persons whose personal work, experiences, and convictions greatly enlarge the capacity of the HSUS to be a more effective advocate for animals.