

Global perspectives on animal welfare: Europe

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Summary

Effective implementation and enforcement of legislation is essential to ensure animal welfare. In the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) European Region the well-established body of national and European Union laws in existence is growing continuously. The growth is due to various factors, such as new technology in animal farming and experimentation, exploitation of wildlife, new understanding of animal needs, and increasing public awareness and concern. The latter, in particular, determines the need for new animal welfare legislation to regulate and discipline the 'use' of animals for different purposes, such as food production, companionship, work and leisure.

This paper intends to provide an overview of the more relevant activities carried out by the Council of Europe and the European Union in the field of animal welfare. The authors identify eLearning as a tool to harmonise the interpretation and the implementation of animal welfare legislation.

Keywords

Animal welfare – Europe – Legislation.

Introduction

The European Region, as a whole, has well-established legislation on animal welfare and European citizens are very concerned about the treatment of animals. Both the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU) have produced a complete and modern body of norms and regulations dealing with the breeding, transport, slaughter and conservation of companion animals, wild animals, farmed animals and laboratory animals (details can be accessed on line at www.coe.int and www.europa.eu.int). Member States apply this normative body conscious that public awareness has increased significantly and they recognise the social impact of their action in this field (1).

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has recently introduced guidelines for the slaughter of animals for human consumption, for the killing of animals for disease control purposes, and for the transport of animals by land and by sea, which will increase the number of countries that consider animal welfare a priority.

The activity of the Council of Europe

The CoE was founded after the Second World War and its Member States extend from the Atlantic to the Urals and include the 25 Member States of the EU, many of the Eastern European Countries, Norway, and Switzerland (46 States). The CoE is an inter-parliamentary body that negotiates treaties on various issues and has dealt extensively with animal welfare as its importance has increased in Europe. Various CoE treaties for animal welfare have been ratified not only by European countries, but also by countries outside of Europe.

The CoE's interest in animal protection was due both to the need for concerted action required by all European national authorities recognising animal protection as a major political issue and to the fact that the principles of respect for animals were part of the common cultural heritage of its Member States.

Five conventions have been drawn up since 1968:

- European Convention for the Protection of Animals during International Transport (European Treaty Series [ETS] 65, 1968), additional protocols to this Convention were passed in 1979 and 2003 (ETS 103 and ETS 193, respectively)
- European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes (ETS 87, 1976)
- European Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter (ETS 102, 1979)
- European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals used for Experimental and other Scientific Purposes (ETS 123, 1986)
- European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals (ETS 125, 1987).

All of these conventions are based on the principle that 'for his own well-being, man may, and sometimes must, make use of animals, but that he has a moral obligation to ensure, within reasonable limits, that the animal's health and welfare is in each case not unnecessarily put at risk' (Council of Europe, Legal affairs: Biological safety use of animals by humans, website: www.coe.int/T/E/Legal_affairs/Legal_cooperation/Biological_safety%2C_use_of_animals/Introduction.asp, accessed 20 September 2005).

Conventions on the protection of animals approved by the CoE, were the first international agreements laying down ethical principles for the transport, farming and slaughter of animals as well as for their use as pets and for experimental purposes. These Conventions were used in various European countries, including the EU, as reference for relevant national legislations (9).

The protection of animals during international transport

The first Convention on animal protection during transport was dated 1968 and was revised in 2003, in order to incorporate new scientific advances and the experience acquired over 30 years of application. The 1968 Convention was a framework document laying down essential principles applying to all species, while the revised edition lays down detailed welfare standards for the most widely traded animals, such as cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry, and horses. In particular, it lays down general conditions for the international transport of animals from preparation for loading to unloading – design of transporters, fitness for transport of the animals, veterinary controls, handling of animals, certificates, etc. – as well as special conditions for the transport of animals by road, air, sea and rail.

Pursuant to the revised Convention, the CoE is now drafting technical protocols concerning space allowances (Article 17), watering, feeding and rest (Article 20) as well as codes of conduct. The new protocols are based on the type of transport being used (road, sea, air and rail) and will replace existing recommendations organised according to the different animal species being transported.

The protection of animals kept for farming purposes

It is a 'framework convention' laying down principles for the keeping, caring and housing of animals, in particular in intensive breeding systems. The Convention applies to animals bred or kept for the production of food, wool, skin or fur or for other farming purposes. The standards defined in the Convention aim to avoid unnecessary suffering or injury, having regard to the condition of housing, food or administered care. To preserve the well-being of animals, the Convention imposes on Parties the obligation to inspect the condition and the health status of animals as well as the technical equipment used in intensive stock-farming systems. In 1992, a Protocol of Amendment to the Convention was opened for signature. This Protocol provides for the extension of the scope of the Convention to the breeding of animals produced as a result of genetic modifications or novel genetic combinations. The Convention has established a Standing Committee that among others has the responsibility of monitoring its application. At present, new recommendations concerning rabbits and farmed fish are in the process of being produced.

The protection of animals for slaughter

The Convention for the protection of animals for slaughter applies to the movement, lairaging, restraint, stunning and slaughter of domestic solipeds, ruminants, pigs, rabbits and poultry. Its provisions have been adapted and elaborated in a Recommendation and a Code of Conduct which the Committee of Ministers adopted in 1991.

The main purpose of the Convention is to help harmonise methods of slaughter in Europe and make them more humane. The first set of provisions imposes a number of obligations concerning the treatment of animals in slaughterhouses, namely:

- suitable equipment must be used for unloading animals
- animals must not be brutalised or mistreated; the striking of sensitive parts of their bodies is forbidden
- animals that are not slaughtered immediately on arrival must be housed and cared for appropriately
- the requisite facilities must be provided at slaughterhouses.

As regards slaughter operations, the Convention stipulates that all animals must be stunned before being bled. Stunning of large animals must be carried out by means of either a gun-type mechanical instrument or by electro- or gas-narcosis to make the animals unconscious. The use of a pole-axe, hammer or puntilla is prohibited by the Convention. Large animals, furthermore, must neither be suspended nor have their movements restricted before being stunned. Where there are exceptions to these rules (ritual slaughter, emergency slaughter, slaughter of poultry and rabbits, etc.), slaughter must be effected in such a way as to spare the animals any unnecessary suffering. These last provisions apply equally to slaughter in places other than slaughterhouses.

The protection of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes

This 1986 Convention, which was amended in June 1998 (ETS 170), concerns the use of animals in procedures of an experimental and scientific nature. Its provisions cover areas such as:

- care and accommodation
- conduct of experiments
- humane killing
- authorisation procedures
- control of breeding and supplying
- facilities
- education and training
- statistical treatment of data.

The Convention includes two technical Appendices, one presenting guidelines for accommodation and care of animals (Appendix A) and one containing tables for the presentation of statistical data on the use of animals for scientific purposes (Appendix B). A revision of Appendix A is in the process of being adopted. It will contain guidelines based on up-to-date knowledge and good practice for the accommodation and care of animals.

The protection of pet animals

The Convention aims at assuring the welfare of animals kept for private leisure and companionship.

It seeks to establish a basic common standard of attitude and practice towards pet ownership. Provisions are included on breeding, boarding, keeping, etc. The Convention also aims at regulating trading in, and breeding of, pet animals, at prohibiting the modification of their natural appearance, and at reducing the number of stray animals.

Furthermore, three resolutions on the protection of pet animals were adopted in 1995. They made reference to surgical operations and breeding, and to the keeping of wild animals as pets.

The activity of the European Union

Regulations on animal protection have been enacted by European States since the 19th Century; even if they may differ in content and application, all of them are based on the principle that to inflict cruelty upon an animal – either voluntarily or through lack of care – is morally wrong and should be punished.

The EU started implementing legislation on animal protection in the 1970s, as it was recognised that many activities relating to animal welfare were of supra-national nature (e.g. transport of animals for trade purposes) (2).

The EU legislation covers both the protection of animals in general and the specific measures needed to protect farm animals (with separate legislation covering calves, pigs and laying hens in particular), wild animals and animals used for experimental purposes in relation to rearing, in the various stage of their life (transport, slaughter, killing, etc.).

In the treaty that gave birth to the European Community (Treaty of Rome, 1957), animals were identified as 'goods'. Animals were considered agricultural products and the pertaining legislation did not take into account their welfare. Animal welfare appeared for the first time in the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, which amended the Treaty of Rome, when the Prime Ministers of EU Member States agreed to include a special legally 'binding protocol' on animal welfare.

The protocol had a great impact as:

a) it recognised that contracting parties wished to ensure improved protection and respect for the welfare of animals as sentient beings, even if certain derogations for religious and cultural traditions were allowed

b) it required the Community and its Member States, to pay full attention to the welfare of animals, in formulating and implementing the Community's agriculture policies as well as when formulating legislation concerning research, internal markets, agriculture and transport.

Furthermore, the protocol invited parties to respect the legislative or administrative provisions and customs of the Member States relating, in particular, to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage.

The EU policies, therefore, make the physical and psychological needs of farmed animals a priority issue in animal production. Furthermore, in February 2000, the EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection made clear that animal welfare issues are within the responsibility of the European Food Safety Authority, as they are integrated with food policy.

At present, the main areas affected by animal welfare legislation in the EU include:

- transport
- slaughter
- battery hens
- veal, calves and pigs
- animal experimentation
- drift netting
- seals
- fur trapping
- conservation/wild birds
- animals kept in zoos.

With reference to pet animals, EU legislation deals only with transportation and veterinary controls of pets for trade purposes and with trade in the exotic pet species that are listed in Council Regulation 338/97 on the protection of wild fauna. All other aspects of companion animal welfare are dealt with in national legislation and differ from country to country.

Transport

The EU has adopted ten different legislative acts on the protection of animals during transport in the period from 1991 to 2005. This important body of regulations deals with:

- animal movements during import/export journeys, since it is legitimately a matter of widespread public concern
- the harmonisation of norms within Member States and between Member States and third-party countries, since it is a high priority, because it appears to be the key connection among the countries themselves
- the improvement of the behaviour of animal handlers during loading, unloading and transport, since it positively affects animal health and their response to stressful conditions
- training of personnel dealing with transport, since this is the most effective way of ensuring norm application and harmonisation.

About 356 million head of livestock (not including poultry) are transported every year in the European Union (5). Each year live animals such as cattle, sheep, pigs and horses are transported huge distances across Europe and beyond, on journeys which are often several thousand kilometres long.

Horse transport for slaughter from Central and Eastern Europe into some Member States is a particular area of concern. Since the opening up of Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, approximately 140,000 equines are being imported into the EU annually for slaughter, mainly by road. Poland, the Baltic States, Hungary and Romania are the main exporters and Italy is the main importer (more than 80%).

In summer, temperatures in Continental Europe can be very high; as a result, animals travelling in livestock trucks can suffer from the effects of heat and dehydration, and some may die. During long journeys it is also common for some animals to become injured or exhausted.

Problems have been exacerbated because the law is rarely enforced; this is mainly due to the low level of priority given by the Competent Authority in each country to the enforcement of the existing norms.

Between 1997 and 1999 the European Commission carried out a series of investigations in EU countries and found several critical points, including:

- inadequate road vehicles
- illegal route plans and non-compliance with travelling time limits
- negligence and poor handling of animals
- transport of unfit animals
- insufficient ventilation in road vehicles
- overloading
- difficulties in checking that vehicles were authorised to transport animals
- problems of norm interpretation.

The Commission also reported that the correction of some important deficiencies depended upon the attitudes and engagement of the inspectors and of other people working with animals (3). Member States were subsequently invited to allocate adequate resources to inform, train and co-ordinate the actions of their field inspectors, in order to apply the legislation.

With reference to shipments to third countries, it was reported that once animals were unloaded into a non-EU country, they were no longer protected by EU law and

could therefore suffer the consequences of inappropriate handling and treatment.

On 19 June 2001, the EU Council invited the Commission to submit proposals for ensuring the effective implementation and strict enforcement of existing EU legislation. The Council asked for proposals aimed at improving the protection and welfare of animals as well as at preventing the occurrence and spread of infectious animal diseases. The Council also wanted legislation that would introduce more stringent requirements so as to prevent pain and suffering and safeguard the welfare and health of animals during and after transport. The European Parliament also called upon the Commission to make reforms on animal transport legislation in November 2001.

The European Parliament also decided to call upon the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare (SCAHAW) in relation to journey duration, harmonisation of all current legislation, introduction of compulsory training for staff, and assurance that veterinary checks were undertaken at EU borders. The opinion adopted in 2002 by the SCAHAW was used as the basis for a revision of the animal transport rules proposed by the Commission in 2003.

Since Member States could not agree on a revision of travelling times or the stocking densities of animals on lorries, the Commission agreed that these two issues would be subject to revision in the light of the outcomes of enforcement by the Member States. This compromise allowed for the adoption of better enforcement tools in animal transport. This proposal was agreed by the EU Council of Ministers in November 2004 and published as Council Regulation (EC) No. 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport. It will enter into force on 5 January 2007.

Most of the EU laws on farm animals are Directives. They are binding laws outlining minimum requirements, while allowing some flexibility for Member States to implement national legislation that takes account of regional, cultural or national differences. This means that usually there is some variation in national laws due to differing interpretations or the implementation of additional requirements.

In contrast to a Directive, a Regulation is 'binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States', so the introduction of the EU Regulation on animal transport means that it is expected to be implemented uniformly across all Member States. This harmonisation will deliver improvements in enforcement, particularly because there will be uniform documentation and rules relating to international journeys. However, Article 1 states that the Regulation shall not be an obstacle to any stricter national measures aimed at improving the welfare of animals during transport.

Council Regulation (EC) No. 1/2005 increases animal welfare, significantly improving the enforcement of animal transport rules in Europe. It is applicable to vertebrates and in particular to farm animals, such as bovines, equines (excluding registered horses), sheep, goats, pigs, and poultry. It also increases accountability, identifying clearly who is responsible for what throughout the animals' journey and introduces new, more efficient tools that aid enforcement, e.g. satellite navigation systems that allow the location of transporters to be monitored. The Regulation also introduces much stricter rules for journeys of more than 8 h, including the need for substantial upgrading in vehicle standards.

The Regulation recognises that the most stressful periods of the journey occur during loading and unloading and, therefore, introduces rules to deal with these situations at slaughterhouses and/or at harbours.

The norm also introduces compulsory training for:

- staff of the Competent Authority, so that they are able to check data recorded by the navigation system and the recording equipment on livestock transporters
- drivers and attendants, who also need to pass an exam recognised by the Competent Authority.

The new regulation broaches the problem of animal transport from a different point of view: in the past, norms were mainly focused on means and their requisites, journey duration, and document requirements. Regulation No. 1/2005 has introduced the concept of individual 'responsibility' of all the professionals involved in transport. The norm enforces vigilance and control systems during transport, and considers the possibility of new improvements arising from data collected and new scientific evidence.

Farm animal welfare

Council Directive 98/58/EC provides the general framework for farm animal welfare and applies to all animals (including fish, reptiles and amphibians) kept for food, wool, skin, fur or other farming purposes. Animal owners and keepers are considered responsible for the welfare of animals placed under their care and for preventing unnecessary pain, suffering or injury. Appropriate training is also compulsory for workers devoted to animal care. The same Directive provides general requirements for regular inspections, treatment for sick animals, recording of veterinary treatments and mortality, livestock buildings, outdoor shelters, etc.

Commission Decision 2000/50/EC, concerning minimum requirements for the inspection of holdings on which animals are kept for farming purposes, obliges Member

States to submit a report summarising the results of the inspections carried out to verify the welfare of animals kept for farming purposes; this report must be submitted to the Commission every two years. The report should include information on staff (number and training), inspections, record keeping, freedom of movement, buildings, equipment, feeding and other substances, mutilations, and breeding procedures.

Calves

The production of calves is governed by three acts: Council Directive 91/629/EEC, Council Directive 97/2/EC, and Commission Decision 97/182/EC, laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves. The basic principles laid down in these acts are the ban of individual pens or boxes to rear calves after eight weeks of age (except for veterinary treatments) and the provision for appropriate stocking densities, treatments and feeding.

Pigs

Council Directive 91/630/EEC, Council Directive 2001/88/EC, and Commission Directive 2001/93/EC give specific rules for the protection of pigs. They define in detail conditions for the housing and care of pigs in different stages of life, from space allocation, to feeding and veterinary treatments, from physical procedures to stock-handling skills and inspections by farmers.

Hens

Laying hens are protected by Council Directive 99/74/EEC, replacing the previous 1988 legislation. This Directive defines cage measures, minimum spaces, environmental enrichments (more in general, minimum standards) and lays down principles for non-cage systems. Moreover, it introduces the compulsory identification and registration of egg production establishments, by the Competent Authority of the Member States. Commission Directive 2002/04/EC regulates this identification and registration, as it is a means of tracing eggs intended for human consumption.

Slaughter

Council Directive 93/119/EC is dedicated to the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing: it lays down norms for movement, lairaging, restraint, stunning, and slaughter of animals kept to produce meat, skin, fur and other products, and also for killing animals for disease control purposes. As for transport, this Directive considers the skills of professionals involved in these processes to be critical, since their competence is essential in order to avoid unnecessary animal suffering.

The Directive states that the official veterinarian is responsible for the efficient and humane treatment of

animals. He/she is also responsible for monitoring the religious slaughtering procedures authorised by Member States, to ensure that unnecessary suffering and pain are prevented.

The Directive also states that establishments in third countries authorised to export to the EU shall offer the same guarantees provided by European legislation: this provision is now specifically introduced into bilateral agreements for trade of animals and animal products between EU and third countries.

Wild animals

The objectives of Council Directive 1999/22/EC are the protection of wild fauna, biodiversity conservation, and regulating the keeping of wild animals in zoos. Member States are responsible for licensing and inspecting zoos, whose requirements are also defined by the Directive. The most important elements of the Directive cover:

- participation in research and information exchange programmes
- training in conservation skills
- captive breeding
- repopulation and reintroduction
- promotion of education programmes on the conservation of biodiversity
- the provision of zoo accommodation that considers the requirements of different species and that provides species-specific environmental enrichment
- the provision of high husbandry standards, preventive veterinary care, and appropriate nutrition.

Furthermore, the EU regulates the protection of wildlife habitats and international wildlife trade, establishing different levels of protection in relation to international trade: strict, medium, and no protection.

Animals for experimental and other scientific purposes

Harmonising legislation among Member States is the purpose of Council Directive 86/609/EEC on the protection of animals kept for experimental and other scientific purposes. The objective is both to avoid distortion of trade conditions in the internal market and to reduce to a minimum the use of animals in experiments. Animal experimentation, in fact, can be authorised only if scientifically satisfactory non-animal methods are not available.

Care of the animals must be adequate and pain, suffering, stress or lasting harm must be minimised and cannot be inflicted unless absolutely necessary.

Animal experiments are permitted for testing drugs, foodstuffs, and other substances or products, and for the following reasons:

- the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of human, animal or plant diseases
- the study of physiological conditions in man, animals, or plants
- the protection of the natural environment for human and animal health and welfare.

A national Competent Authority is responsible for the authorisation of each experiment involving animals and of the personnel carrying it out. Experiments can be performed only by adequately trained professionals (both conducting the experiment and caring for the animals), under the supervision of authorised specialists, in establishments authorised for this purpose.

Animals used in experiments should be specifically bred in captivity, in approved establishments. The use of stray dogs and cats is forbidden.

The Directive also gives specific prescriptions for animal housing and care and prevention of pain and suffering; Member States must publish statistical data on the experiments authorised, in order to avoid unjustified duplications.

Switzerland

Switzerland adopted all the conventions of the CoE on animal protection and has since developed comprehensive legislation on the subject (10). A comprehensive system to promote animal welfare was implemented, combining the work of federal, cantonal and regional Veterinary Services. The system is based on a network of experts, a surveillance and monitoring system, a comprehensive legislation enforced uniformly, and a continuous analysis of data resulting from the experiments authorised.

Education and training of all the stakeholders, such as veterinarians, animal keepers, transporters, handlers, and personnel at slaughter-houses, are compulsory. For example, a specific Ordinance (455.12, 22 August 1986) requires that a skill certificate be obtained by all animal keepers who care for domestic and wild animals and animals kept for scientific purposes, in refuges, clinics, establishments, and for trade purposes.

Housing systems and equipment can be marketed only after an authorisation of the Federal Veterinary Office, which can be provided only if the systems or the equipment comply with the requirements.

Political changes and other perspectives

New legislation is largely influenced by public concern and expectations. It is, therefore, important to consider briefly other perspectives, such as political changes, and the perception of consumers and animal welfare groups.

The European Commission and animal welfare in the international trade of animals

The Commission of the European Union is very active in promoting animal welfare both within and without the EU. However, the Commission is fully aware that its agreements on animal welfare standards are not automatically recognised by the World Trade Organization (WTO); neither the 1994 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade nor other WTO agreements include any reference to animal welfare standards.

For this reason, the European Commission has been negotiating bilateral and multilateral trade agreements that include specific provisions for animal welfare. The first of these agreements was signed with Chile in 2002. Article 1 states clearly that reaching a common understanding on animal welfare standards is one of the goals of the Agreement. The document identifies slaughter as the first area in which animal welfare standards should be implemented. The EU-Chile Joint Management Committee has recently decided to extend the provision to transport.

The European Commission as an observer in the OIE

The European Commission obtained the status of official observer within the OIE in February 2004, during the first OIE Global Conference on animal welfare held in Paris (7). The observer status enables the Commission to promote the EU view on international animal health and welfare issues while strengthening the relationship with the OIE. The Commission endorses the OIE's approach of basing all animal welfare guidelines and standards on the best available science provided by expert groups advising on specific issues. Generating animal welfare guidelines and standards at the OIE level is likely to facilitate their acceptance internationally.

Recently, OIE expert groups ('*ad hoc* groups') have developed international standards and guidelines on the welfare of animals during land and sea transport, slaughter for human consumption and killing for disease control purposes.

OIE Member Countries, in any case, may maintain their own standards if these are higher than those approved by the OIE International Committee, i.e. the EU standards.

The role of animal welfare associations

Eight out of ten of the new EU Member States are located in Central and Eastern Europe. Animal welfare non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been working actively in many of these countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) for several years, and have established cooperation programmes to support the development of local groups and farm animal welfare movements.

As a result of the support of NGOs and the efforts of local groups, farm animal welfare is already on the political agenda in these new Member States. Animal welfare associations are also active in ensuring that these new Member States will support – rather than block – welfare reforms.

Consumer perception

Animal product consumers are increasingly demanding that animals be reared, handled, transported and slaughtered humanely (4). Public concern for increased animal protection and welfare comes primarily from urbanised populations, is inversely proportional to the population size engaged in agriculture, and is increasing throughout the world (6). This concern about the welfare of animals is due to the public conviction that animals can experience pain and suffering, if improperly cared for or mistreated (6).

In 1998 the EU Commission financed a project entitled 'Consumer concern about animal welfare and the impact on food choice' to analyse consumer attitudes in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, France and Germany. Results showed that, although consumers are concerned about farm animal welfare, this concern is not critical in food choice. Consumer concern is multidimensional and animal welfare is considered an indicator of other, usually more important, product attributes such as safety, quality and healthiness.

Consumers define animal welfare in terms of appropriate living conditions and humane killing. At the same time,

they claim that they are not well informed about modern animal production and would like to have more information so as to make a responsible choice. Indeed, although the majority of consumers report high levels of concern about animal welfare, such concerns are not translated into behaviour. The majority of consumers claim they are willing to pay more for improved animal welfare, but when purchasing food products such claims do not translate into practice. Cost, as well as food safety and quality, are the main factors influencing their choice.

Consumers would like to see their concerns addressed through a combined strategy that includes establishing acceptable minimum standards and changing agricultural policy to provide farmers with incentives to convert to higher welfare systems.

This improvement on the supply side is to be complemented by developments at the demand level by making compulsory labelling, providing information on animal welfare standards in various systems of production, and implementing a public information campaign to support changes.

In defining policies to address consumer concern on animal welfare and the impact this has on food choice, a wide range of measures has to be envisaged. These may include information campaigns, agricultural policy reshaping, legal definitions for labelling, and advocating consideration of farm animal welfare in WTO negotiations.

The EU has recently provided 39 institutes and universities (representing thirteen European countries) with 18 million euros for a research project entitled 'Integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain: from public concern to improved welfare and transparent quality' ('Welfare quality'). The project studies the relationship between animal welfare and food quality, it also aims to accommodate societal concerns and market demands, and to develop reliable on-farm monitoring systems, product information systems and practical species-specific strategies to improve animal welfare. The project started in May 2004 and will take five years to complete (more details can be found at www.welfarequality.net).

Training

All stakeholders in the food of animal origin production chain in EU Member States and in countries wishing to trade with the EU, are required to develop a very high level of performance, to satisfy both the high standards set by EU legislation and the expectations of consumers.

Compliance with animal welfare standards cannot be assured unless all those involved – such as drivers, animal

keepers, veterinarians, etc. – understand that public awareness on this matter has increased tremendously and that their behaviour should change accordingly. Countries should foster the competence and awareness of operators with appropriate training programmes as a means of ensuring compliance with regulation standards (some EU Member Countries have already started to do this).

The animal welfare standards of the OIE approved by the International Committee in May 2005 (8) indicate that the final result of training should be the reduction of animal fear and stress and a less adverse response to transport. The OIE standards, moreover, emphasise the importance of a high level of competence among all the stakeholders interacting with animals.

Training, therefore, has a strategic role and the aim should be to develop human resources that are fully aware of the importance of management based on scientifically defined animal welfare standards. Training, furthermore, is the most efficient means of assuring the development of both harmonised specialist competences and skills as well as harmonised interpretation of the legislation. The role of veterinarians, in this scenario, is critical, as they have to assure both the well-being of animals through their whole life cycle, and inspection and certification of animal welfare standards. Their education and training should be developed accordingly. An interesting debate is currently under way at the international level in relation to the introduction of animal welfare as a subject in veterinary student curricula. Recommendations were drafted by a working group in February 2004 during the OIE Global Conference on animal welfare.

According to EU regulations, training is also compulsory for non-veterinarian operators involved in animal breeding, slaughtering, and transport, and should include:

- technical and administrative aspects of European legislation on animal protection during transport
- general conditions for transport
- documentation
- animal physiology, drinking and feeding needs, animal behaviour and the concept of stress
- animal handling
- impact of driving on animal welfare
- emergency care for animals
- personnel safety.

Upon completion of training, drivers and keepers must pass a specific examination in order to be certified by the Competent Authority. Traditional training techniques do not appear to be able to assure an effective training by

January 2007 (the deadline established by the EU regulation No. 1/2005 for the enforcement of the new requirements – e.g. satellite navigation systems) as the numbers involved are too big. The new information and communication technologies, however, might offer the opportunity to use new interactive methods, which appear to be able to obtain good results, in a relatively short time, and at affordable prices.

The integration of telecommunications with information technology and the Internet has favoured the development of advanced and innovative web-based learning solutions. More specifically, these solutions:

- are based on systems that guarantee communication, learning and knowledge management
- permit the use of high-quality teaching materials specifically designed for this learning strategy
- permit the creation of customised learning paths
- allow the immediate assessment of what has been learned through self-assessment systems
- increase the motivation of the students who choose an on-line training experience
- comply with market standards, i.e. the specifications, guidelines and recommendations that were established to guarantee the communication between and/or joint operation of different technologies
- help to save money (e.g. travel expenses, teachers and experts, simultaneous delivery to large numbers of learners, etc.).

One of the main goals of eLearning systems is to foster the co-operation of participants in the training event. This is why co-operation-based technologies and specific software tools are used, thus creating an environment in which multiple users can collaborate and work.

Training based on new information and communication technologies is a great challenge not only because it involves advanced technologies, but also because new strategies must be defined to meet the needs of those being trained. However, thanks to eLearning, the international community can explore learning paths that meet the needs of all individuals by taking advantage not only of customised methods and teaching materials, but also of the resources of the Internet as a source of data for research, assessment and complex problem solving. ELearning offers a better service to the user of the training package, while overcoming the impediment of traditional training: the classroom.

These advantages may be offered to all stakeholders dealing with animals, wherever in the world they may be, thanks to a 'localisation' of the learning products, which

consists not only in the translation of learning materials, but also in an in-depth analysis of regional, national, and local situation and training-need assessment.

Conclusions

European regulations on animal welfare, and particularly those on the protection of animals during transport, are at present, among the most advanced in the world. They are based on principles already implemented in other sectors – food safety, hazard analysis critical control point, traceability, quality, etc. – and they promote the concept of individual responsibility.

The accent on operator responsibility forces all countries to support a consistent and rapid effort to sustain their professional growth. This process will probably not be homogeneous, but training can help tremendously in both

accelerating and harmonising it. Training programmes should be easy to implement, low-cost, and should be valued not only in terms of learning results, but also in terms of consistent application of welfare principles and regulations on the job.

E-Learning could be the tool to adopt to reach these goals as it is easy to implement and deliver, low-cost, and takes into account the various components of the learning process (e.g. learning styles and attitudes, motivation and interest, technologies, etc.).



Perspectives mondiales en matière de bien-être animal : Europe

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Résumé

Pour garantir le bien-être animal, il est essentiel que la législation soit appliquée et respectée. Dans la région Europe de l'Organisation mondiale de la santé animale (OIE), la législation nationale et de l'Union européenne s'étoffe en permanence. Divers facteurs concourent à cet essor, notamment les nouvelles technologies appliquées à l'élevage et à l'expérimentation animale, l'exploitation de la faune sauvage, les nouvelles connaissances concernant les besoins des animaux ainsi que la sensibilisation et l'intérêt accru du public. De ce dernier facteur en particulier découle la nécessité de mettre en place une nouvelle législation en matière de bien-être animal pour réglementer l'utilisation des animaux à différentes fins, telles que la production alimentaire, la compagnie, l'activité professionnelle et les loisirs, et pour prendre des mesures à cet égard. Le présent article vise à fournir une présentation générale des activités les plus importantes menées par le Conseil de l'Europe et l'Union européenne dans le domaine du bien-être animal. Les auteurs proposent l'apprentissage en ligne en tant qu'outil permettant d'harmoniser l'interprétation et l'application de la législation en matière de bien-être animal.

Mots-clés

Bien-être animal – Europe – Législation.



Perspectivas mundiales en materia de bienestar animal: Europa

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Resumen

La aplicación y observancia efectivas de la legislación son requisitos ineludibles para garantizar el bienestar de los animales. En la Región Europea de la Organización Mundial de Sanidad Animal (OIE) se sigue ampliando el sólido acervo de leyes nacionales y europeas en la materia. Ello responde a una suma de factores, entre otros la aplicación de nuevas tecnologías en producción y experimentación animal, la explotación de la fauna salvaje, las nuevas ideas sobre las necesidades de los animales y la creciente sensibilidad y preocupación del público al respecto. Esto último, en particular, hace necesarias nuevas leyes de bienestar animal que vengán a reglamentar y disciplinar el 'uso' de animales en ámbitos tan diversos como la producción de alimentos, la compañía, el trabajo o las actividades recreativas.

Los autores tratan de ofrecer una panorámica general de las actividades del Consejo de Europa y la Unión Europea relacionadas más directamente con el tema del bienestar animal. En su opinión, la enseñanza electrónica puede ser una herramienta interesante para unificar la interpretación y aplicación de la legislación en la materia.

Palabras clave

Bienestar animal – Europa – Legislación.



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