

SETTING OF HUMANE FARM ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS

PRINCIPAL CONCERNS ABOUT INDUSTRIAL FARMING SYSTEMS & PRACTICES

This paper sets out the scientific research and the principles which we believe are important in considering farm animal welfare.

Core principles

CIWF believes that the following principles should guide the way in which animals are farmed:

- ?? Animals should not be kept in systems or be subject to practices which impose ill-health, pain or injury on them.
- ?? Animals should be kept in such a way that they are able to perform their natural behaviours.
- ?? Animals should neither be kept in isolation, nor in overcrowded conditions.
- ?? Animals should not be kept in stalls which are so narrow that they cannot turn round, or in cages.
- ?? Animals should be kept in appropriate social groupings as in most cases they have strong social instincts. Such groups should, however, not be too large.
- ?? Animals should be provided with adequate, clean bedding (preferably straw); they should not be kept on bare concrete or slatted floors.

?? The use of fast-growing or high-yielding breeds when this leads to ill-health or pain should be avoided.

?? Non-therapeutic mutilations (such as tail-docking and de-beaking), operations or invasive procedures should be avoided.

Position in Europe

The last ten years have seen a steady growth in public concern about animal welfare in the European Union (EU).

As a result, significant improvements have been achieved. The veal crate has been prohibited in the UK since 1990 and will become illegal throughout the EU in 2007 (the veal crate is so narrow that the calf cannot turn round). The battery cage for egg-laying hens has been banned in the EU, a prohibition which comes into force in 2012.

Sow gestation stalls/crates are prohibited in the UK and Sweden (sow stalls/crates are so narrow that the sow cannot turn round). Finland and the Netherlands have also prohibited sow gestation stalls/crates, bans which come into force in 2006 and 2008 respectively. Sow gestation stalls/crates will become illegal throughout the EU in 2013. The tethering of sows will be illegal in the EU as a whole from 2006 and is already illegal in certain Member States.

Crucially in 1997, the EU gave animals a new legal status as “sentient beings” in a Protocol annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam. This means they are now recognised as creatures capable of feeling pain and suffering rather than as being simply goods or products.

Industrial farming

The majority of pigs, chickens and turkeys are farmed in industrial systems in the USA, the EU and in certain developing countries. They are kept indoors throughout their lives, crammed into overcrowded, barren sheds or, in the case of egg-laying hens, cages. Many calves and sows are confined for most of their lives in crates or stalls which are so narrow that the animals cannot even turn round. Intensively farmed animals never experience fresh air or daylight until the day they are taken off to the slaughterhouse.

Animals’ health has often been seriously impaired by the practice of selective breeding for enhanced productivity. Broiler chickens (the birds reared for their meat) have been bred to grow so quickly that often their legs cannot properly support their overdeveloped bodies. As a result, millions suffer from painful, sometimes crippling leg disorders. Turkeys, bred to develop huge upper bodies, have become so

misshapen that they can no longer mate naturally and many adult males suffer from degenerative hip disorders.

Industrial systems invariably include one or more of the following elements:

1. Serious health problems or physical pain are imposed on the animals;
2. The animals are prevented from performing much of their natural behaviour. Systems which prevent sows from turning round or hens from stretching their wings must be condemned as unacceptable; and
3. The animals are prevented from engaging in the social behaviour which is natural to their species.

Moreover, each year millions of farm animals are mutilated. Piglets are tail-docked and castrated, hens and turkeys de-beaked and lambs castrated. These painful operations are nearly always carried out without anaesthetic. It cannot be right to cut bits off healthy animals for non-veterinary reasons simply to make them more amenable to our purpose.

Main concerns

CIWF believes that the following systems and practices should be prohibited and should be excluded from any humane farming standards:

Hens

- ?? Battery cages for egg-laying hens
- ?? Forced molting of hens
- ?? De-beaking of hens

Pigs

- ?? Sow gestation stalls/crates and the tethering of sows
- ?? Keeping pigs on bare concrete or slatted or perforated floors; pigs must be provided with straw or some other suitable material both for physical and thermal comfort and to enable them to perform natural behaviours
- ?? Routine tail-docking
- ?? Castration

Calves reared for veal

- ?? Veal crates
- ?? A diet deficient in roughage and iron (this diet is commonly used in the veal crate system)

Broiler chickens

- ?? The use of selective breeding, growth-promoting antibiotics and rich diets to produce such rapid growth rates that many broilers suffer from painful leg disorders and die of heart failure
- ?? Restrictive feeding regimes for broiler breeders which leads to hunger in the birds

Overcrowding

- ?? The severe overcrowding which is commonplace in pig and broiler intensive farming should be prohibited.

The rest of this paper sets out CIWF's principal concerns in more detail and in particular, shows these concerns to be supported by scientific veterinary research. In referring to that research we draw heavily on reports by the European Commission's Scientific Veterinary Committee (SVC) whose reports consist of extensive reviews of the scientific literature. The SVC has recently been re-named as the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW). These reports can be found at http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/index_en.html

THE BATTERY CAGE FOR EGG-LAYING HENS

The vast majority of eggs produced in the EU, the USA and many other countries come from battery hens. Normally in this system, anything from 5-11 hens are crammed into a cage which is so small that the hens cannot even stretch their wings, let alone walk or peck and scratch at the ground. In the cage, hens are prevented from performing most of their natural behaviours; they cannot, for example, perch, dust-bathe or lay their eggs in a nest.

In their 1996 Report, the EU's Scientific Veterinary Committee (SVC) – which is composed of veterinary surgeons from all over the EU – concluded that:

“Battery cage systems provide a barren environment for the birds ... It is clear that because of its small size and its barrenness, the battery cage as used at present has inherent [my underlining] severe disadvantages for the welfare of hens”.

The SVC went on to stress that:

“Hens have a strong preference for laying their eggs in a nest and are highly motivated to perform nesting behaviour” (SVC, 1996).

In the battery cage, nest building is impossible. Hens have neither sufficient space to perform pre-laying movements nor any nesting material.

The SVC also concluded that:

“Hens have a strong preference for a littered floor for pecking, scratching and dust-bathing”.

In the cage, there is no litter and therefore pecking, scratching and dust-bathing are all impossible.

The SVC also stressed that:

“Hens have a preference to perch, especially at night”.

Again, perching cannot be performed in the cage.

In addition, battery hens are prone to suffering from painful physical injuries. The lack of movement imposed by the cage results in battery hens having such weak and brittle bones that a significant number suffer from broken bones by the time they come to be slaughtered. In addition, in the UK alone, around 500,000 battery hens a year die from brittle bones; the bone fragility can lead to a type of paralysis which can result in hens dying from starvation at the back of the cage simply because they cannot reach the food and water points.

Moreover, as a result of a lifetime spent standing on the cage’s hard wire floor, battery hens often experience foot and claw damage. They can suffer from lesions and fissures on the feet and from overgrown, twisted or broken claws.

A major review by Baxter (1994) concluded that *“The scientific evidence ... suggests that battery cages cause suffering in laying hens in at least 7 different ways”*. He stressed that:

“Deprived of litter, caged hens are prevented from dust-bathing and foraging. Without access to a nest site, nesting motivation is frustrated and

without a perch, roosting is prevented. Restrictions on movement within a cage cause frustration and prevent normal bone maintenance, particularly in the legs and wings”.

In June 1999 the EU’s Agriculture Council prohibited the battery cage for laying hens; this prohibition comes into force in 2012. Although we are disappointed that the phase out period is so long, we are delighted that this immensely cruel system is at long last on its way out.

Forced molting

This is the practice in which hens are deprived of food for 5-14 days to shock them back into lay.

Depriving birds of food for such a length of time is clearly cruel and is prohibited in the EU. Only 5% of UK hens are molted and this is done not by depriving them of food for lengthy periods, but by changing their diet, for example, to oats.

CIWF believes that forced molting should be prohibited.

De-beaking: feather-pecking can be prevented in good perchery and free-range systems

Opponents of non-cage systems (i.e. percheries and free-range) argue that de-beaking is necessary to prevent feather-pecking and cannibalism in these systems. However, both scientific research and practical experience show that these behaviours can be addressed without resorting to the painful mutilation of de-beaking. Feather-pecking and cannibalism can be prevented in perchery and free-range systems which are well-designed and well-managed by:

- ?? The provision of ample, high quality litter. A number of scientific studies show that when hens are prevented from (i) pecking and scratching at the ground (i.e. foraging behaviour) and (ii) dust-bathing, they may re-direct these behaviours into pecking the feathers of other hens. The provision of good quality and extensive litter enables hens to engage in pecking and scratching and dust-bathing, thereby reducing feather-pecking.
- ?? Avoiding overcrowding: percheries and the indoor accommodation for free-range hens should not stock at more than 9-12 hens/m².
- ?? Keeping group sizes relatively small: ideally groups should not exceed 100 hens – certainly 500 should be the maximum. Groups can be kept small by using small huts or by sub-dividing larger sheds with partitions.

?? Using strains of hens which are less prone to feather-pecking. Scientific studies show that using strains with a low propensity for feather-pecking can significantly reduce feather-pecking and cannibalism.

THE WELFARE OF PIGS

CIWF believes the following steps are needed to ensure reasonable welfare standards for pigs.

1. Gestation stalls/crates and the tethering of sows should be prohibited.
2. Pigs should be given sufficient space to prevent overcrowding.
3. Pigs should be provided with bedding material, preferably straw.
4. Castration and routine tail-docking and teeth-clipping should be prohibited.

Breeding sows

Gestation stalls/crates are so narrow that the sow cannot even turn round. She is kept like this throughout her 16-week pregnancy – and for pregnancy after pregnancy. In other words, for most of her adult life.

In their 1997 Report the EU's SVC condemned gestation stalls/crates, concluding that:

“No individual pen should be used which does not allow the sow to turn around easily”.

The SVC added that *“sows should preferably be kept in groups”* because *“overall welfare appears to be better when sows are not confined throughout gestation”*.

Scientific research shows that, as compared with sows housed in groups, sows kept in stalls/crates have weaker bones and muscles, a poorer level of cardiovascular fitness and a higher incidence of lameness, inflammatory swellings of joints and urinary tract infections.

Moreover, stereotypic behaviour (e.g. bar-biting) is common in sows confined in stalls/crates. This highly repetitive behaviour is a major indicator of poor welfare. The SVC stated that abnormal inactivity and unresponsiveness is very widespread in confined sows and that *“the sows may well be depressed in the clinical sense”*.

Producers assert that sows kept in groups can be aggressive to each other at feeding and when new animals join the group. Scientific research has established that aggression can largely be prevented:

- ?? if the feeding system is designed to minimise competition for food,
- ?? by keeping the group as stable as possible, in that sows are returned to the same group after farrowing and new animals are brought in only when necessary,
- ?? by introducing environmental complexity, and
- ?? by giving the sows sufficient space.

As indicated earlier, sow gestation stalls/crates have already been prohibited in some EU Member States and will be illegal in the EU as a whole from 2013. The tethering of sows is also already prohibited in some EU Member States and will be illegal throughout the EU from 2006.

Fattening pigs (i.e. the pigs reared for their meat, as opposed to the breeding sows)

Scientific research shows that in natural conditions pigs spend 75% of their daylight hours in activity – rooting, foraging and exploring. None of these activities are possible for many of today’s pigs, the majority of which are factory farmed in many countries. They are kept indoors throughout their lives in barren, overcrowded pens. The principal problems include:

Overcrowding

The SVC recommended that pigs should be given around 50% more space than is commonly given to pigs in factory farming systems. In particular, pigs should be given sufficient space to enable all to lie at the same time in lateral recumbency.

Lack of straw

Pigs should be provided with straw or some other bedding/manipulable material. The SVC emphasised the importance of straw in providing:

- ?? An outlet for chewing and rooting behaviour. Destructive behaviours like tail-biting are reduced by straw.
- ?? Physical and thermal comfort.

?? Dietary fibre.

Many pigs are given no straw or other bedding material, but instead are forced to live on bare concrete or slatted or perforated floors; this can lead to lameness or other injuries. Moreover, the lack of straw, combined with the overcrowding, prevents the pigs from performing their natural behaviours. In order to find an outlet for these frustrated instincts, they sometimes turn to the only other ‘thing’ in their pens – the tails of other pigs. Out of boredom they begin to bite each other’s tails.

Tail-docking

In order to prevent tail-biting, most farmers dock their piglets’ tails with pliers or a hot docking iron. The SVC stressed that docking is likely to be painful when carried out and sometimes leads “*to prolonged pain*”. The SVC concluded that the proper way to prevent tail-biting is not to dock the piglets’ tails, but to keep the animals in good conditions. They stressed that:

“The problems of injury following tail biting should be solved by improved management rather than by tail docking”.

The SVC made it clear that tail-biting can largely be prevented by keeping pigs at a stocking density which is not too high, and by providing straw or other manipulable materials and an adequate diet and sufficient water. Avoiding high levels of dust, ammonia and carbon dioxide is also important in preventing tail-biting. Moreover, aggressive pigs should immediately be removed from the group.

New EU laws

New laws agreed in the EU in 2001 and coming into force in 2003:

?? require pigs to be provided with sufficient straw or other similar material to enable them properly to carry out their natural exploratory and rooting behaviours, and

?? prohibit routine tail-docking.

Castration

In many countries male pigs are castrated to avoid ‘boar taint’. The SVC stressed that “*castration causes severe pain and distress*”. CIWF believes that the castration of pigs should be prohibited.

Teeth-clipping

Many piglets' teeth are clipped to prevent them damaging the sow's udder and the faces of litter mates as they compete for teats. The SVC condemned this practice, stating that *"It seems unlikely that the causing of pain in every tooth of every piglet could be justified by the relatively minor advantages which occur [from] the practice"*.

THE WELFARE OF BROILER CHICKENS

Broilers are the chickens reared for their meat. The vast majority in many countries, including the USA, the EU, Brazil and Thailand are factory farmed. They are kept 30,000-40,000 at a time in huge windowless sheds which are so overcrowded that, as the birds grow bigger, one can barely see the floor so thickly is it 'carpeted' with chickens.

The most severe health and welfare problems arise from the fact that the industry pushes the birds to ever faster growth rates. This is done mainly through selective breeding but also by the use of rich diets and growth-promoting antibiotics. Today's birds reach their slaughter weight in just 40-41 days, which is twice as fast as 30 years ago. What grows quickly is the body muscle; the legs fail to keep pace with the rapid body growth and, as a result, cannot properly support the overgrown body. This leads to huge numbers of broilers suffering from painful, sometimes crippling leg disorders. In the worst cases, the birds can only move by crawling on their shanks.

A new Report by the EU's Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare revealed that the broiler industry inflicts a range of serious health and welfare problems on the birds. (The Scientific Committee for Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) is the new name for what was previously called the Scientific Veterinary Committee).

The SCAHAW Report on broilers concludes that:

1. Most welfare problems imposed on broilers result from the industry's determination to push birds – mainly through selective breeding – to ever faster growth rates (Conclusion 2).
2. These rapid growth rates lead to many broiler chickens suffering from painful leg disorders which, says the SCAHAW, *"are a major cause of poor welfare in broilers"*. The leg disorders result in impaired walking ability (Conclusion 6).
3. The SCAHAW pours cold water on industry claims to be trying to reduce the frequency of leg disorders through their selective breeding policies. The

Scientific Committee says that in reality the industry has given low importance to this and that up to now their attempts have “*not improved welfare*” (Conclusion 3).

4. Fast growth rates also lead to:
 - a) Ascites (a form of heart failure) which “*has a serious negative effect on broiler welfare*” and “*has increased in recent years*” (Conclusion 9).
 - b) Sudden-Death-Syndrome – “*an acute heart failure condition*” which may “*have an important impact on bird welfare*” (Conclusion 10).
5. Current stocking densities in the broiler sheds are too high and result in poorer welfare than if birds were given more space. The Scientific Committee states that: “*Pathologies (breast blisters, chronic dermatitis and leg disorders) are a result of high stocking and the presence of infectious agents and hockburn has been shown to be worse at 30-40 kg/m² than at 24 kg/m². Studies have shown that walking ability is severely affected at 45 kg/m² and is worse at 32 kg/m² than at 25 kg/m².*” (Conclusion 25).

The Committee goes on to state that: “*Studies have shown that locomotor behaviour, preening and general activity are reduced and disturbance of resting is increased at the higher stocking density in comparisons between 25 and 30, 24 and 32, 28 and 33, and 30 and 36 kg/m². These findings are all indicative of poorer welfare at the higher stocking densities*” (Conclusion 25).

The Committee stresses: “*It is clear from the behaviour and leg disorder studies that the stocking density must be 25 kg/m² or lower for major welfare problems to be largely avoided and that above 30 kg/m², even with very good environmental control systems, there is a steep rise in the frequency of serious problems*” (Page 66).

This all indicates that the highest acceptable stocking density is 30 kg/m² (6.67 lb/ft²) and that welfare would be much better if stocking densities were 25 kg/m² (5.56 lb/ft²) or lower.

6. Concentrations of ammonia having detrimental effects on broiler welfare are regularly observed in practice (Conclusion 18).

Chronic hunger of broiler breeders

The health problems of broilers (problems induced by the extremely fast growth rates) are so severe that if - instead of being slaughtered at 6 weeks - they were allowed to live on, most would die before the age of puberty at 18 weeks.

This presents an enormous problem as regards one sector of the broiler industry - the broiler breeders, the birds whose role it is to produce the subsequent generations. The breeders must not only survive into adulthood, but must also remain sufficiently healthy to breed.

If the breeders were fed normally, most would die before puberty and the survivors would suffer from reduced fertility. To avoid these problems, the industry has to find a way of slowing down the fast growth rates of the breeders (growth rates which have been imposed on the breeders to ensure that their offspring put on weight as quickly as possible). The industry's solution is to feed breeders on severely restricted rations - in some cases just 25% - 50% of what they would eat if given free access to food. One major scientific study concluded that restricted-fed broiler breeders are "*chronically hungry, frustrated and stressed*".

The EU's SCAHAW Report concludes that broiler breeders are routinely subjected to "*chronic quantitative food restriction*" which leads to them being "*very hungry*" (Conclusion 31). The SCAHAW condemns this practice stating that "*The severe feed restriction ... results in unacceptable welfare problems*" and they insist that "*The welfare of breeding birds must be improved*" (Recommendations).

CIWF believes that the new SCAHAW Report shows that the intensive broiler industry inflicts serious health and welfare problems on the birds. The Scientific Committee makes it clear that the industry's drive to ever faster growth rates leads to painful leg disorders, ascites and sudden-death-syndrome in the birds reared for their meat and severe food restriction and hunger in the breeding flock.

THE WELFARE OF DAIRY COWS

The selection of cows for ever higher milk yields has led to a number of health and welfare problems. Professor John Webster, one of the world's leading dairy cattle experts, has written that such problems may arise:

- ?? as a direct consequence of the intensity and duration of the metabolic demands involved in high levels of lactation, or
- ?? more probably, as a consequence of feeding, housing and management inappropriate to the physiology of cows bred for high yields.

The main problems for high yielding cows include:

1. **Metabolic hunger**

Such cows have an intense, sustained need to eat and digest sufficient food to sustain the mammary gland's capacity to produce milk. The cow will suffer from hunger if she is unable to get sufficient nutrients required for high levels of lactation and simultaneous pregnancy. She may also suffer digestive overload as her digestive system struggles to cope with processing a large quantity of food. She will also be physically exhausted as the time needed for eating means she has insufficient time for resting.

2. **Lameness**

Lameness is an extremely painful condition. A number of factors lead to lameness:

- * As seen above, high yielding cows need a large quantity of nutrients. Often they are fed starchy concentrates which can cause rumen acidosis and vascular damage to the feet, presenting as laminitis.
- * Most foot lameness occurs in the outer claws of the hind feet. The large, distended udders of high yielding cows distort the hind legs and throw excessive weight on to the outer claws.
- * Poor housing: cows forced to stand on concrete, especially if it is covered in wet, acid slurry, are prone to lameness.

3. **Mastitis**

Mastitis is a major health problem. It can be reduced by cleanliness in the housing, hygienic teat management and correct maintenance of milking machines.

4. **Metabolic diseases**

High levels of productivity are responsible for production diseases such as milk fever or grass staggers, which are due to deficiencies of calcium and magnesium respectively. Both these diseases can lead to rapid death.

High yielding cows are also prone to ketosis which is usually due to the cow having to work her metabolism too hard to sustain her milk yield.

5. **Exhaustion**

Many cows become unable to meet the sustained physiological and metabolic demands of lactation. As a result, they suffer a severe loss of body condition and become chronically exhausted. Often they are left in this state of suffering for several months before being culled.

BST

CIWF is opposed to the use of BST. In its 1999 report, the EU's Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare condemned BST, concluding that:

“BST administration causes substantially and very significantly poorer welfare because of increased foot disorders, mastitis, reproductive disorders and other production-related diseases. These are problems which would not occur if BST were not used and often result in unnecessary pain, suffering and distress the injection of BST and its repetition every 14 days also causes localised swellings which are likely to result in discomfort and hence some poor welfare”.

Oxytocin

CIWF is also opposed to the use of this hormone to increase milk yields as high yields lead to the problems outlined above.

FEEDLOTS FOR BEEF CATTLE

CIWF is opposed to the use of intensive feedlots for cattle as they impose serious health problems on the animals.

Feed-induced problems

Feedlot cattle are given very high energy cereal feeds which can lead to:

- ?? chronic indigestion
- ?? rumen acidosis
- ?? pathology of the rumen wall which can result in liver abscesses
- ?? laminitis in the feet.

Moving cattle to feedlots

Great stress is involved in bringing animals off range and on to feedlots. The transportation, the mixing of animals from different groups and the handling can all be stressful. This can lead to 'shipping fever' – lethal pneumonias and pasteurellas.

THE VEAL CRATE SYSTEM

Essential characteristics

The veal crate system is generally understood to have two essential characteristics:

- a) the calves are kept in a solid-sided crate made of wood, which is so narrow that the calf cannot even turn round from the age of about two weeks; and
- b) in order to keep the flesh pale, the calf is fed an extremely unhealthy diet deficient in iron and roughage; indeed many crated calves are given no solid food at all.

Principal criticisms of the veal crate system

In 1995 the EU's Scientific Veterinary Committee (SVC) published a major Report on the Welfare of Calves. The report is a detailed review of the scientific literature in this field. The report is unequivocal in its criticism of the veal crate system. It concludes that the welfare of calves kept in crates is "*very poor*" and that the diet which is commonplace in the veal crate system (a diet deficient in roughage and iron) can lead to "*serious health problems*" for the calves.

Lack of space

Veal crates vary in design. Some crates totally box the calf in. Others are open at the rear and, to prevent the calf escaping, it is tethered or yoked to the crate by a metal neck chain.

Whichever version of the crate is used, the net result is that the calf cannot turn round. Moreover, as the calf grows bigger, it cannot groom itself properly, lie down with its legs in a comfortable stretched-out position, or even stand up and lie down without difficulty. All these problems will be exacerbated when the calf is tethered to the crate. The SVC Report pointed out that calves can become tangled in their tethers and injured.

The fact that a young animal needs exercise is recognised by the SVC which stated that research shows that exercise is necessary for normal bone and muscle development. The SVC added that:

“If calves cannot move their limbs sufficiently they are likely to be severely distressed” (page 23 of SVC Report).

In its Conclusions the SVC Report emphasised that:

“Every calf should be able to groom itself properly, turn around, stand up and lie down normally and lie with its legs stretched out if it wishes to do so” (Conclusion 14).

As the calf grows bigger none of these activities are possible in the veal crate.

The SVC Report added that after six months in an individual pen, calves may have severe problems in walking because of lack of exercise. The Report stated:

“Trunkfield et al (1991) reported that some calves kept in individual pens until 6 months of age had difficulty in walking when released from the pens to go to slaughter, and this fact is often reported in the industry” (page 59 of the SVC Report).

Need for social contact

Calves kept in crates are deprived of any normal social contact with other calves. The SVC Report emphasised that social contacts are of great importance to the calf:

“Calves are very social animals interacting frequently with other calves after one week of age and developing normal social behaviour only if they can interact freely with other calves” (Conclusion 13).

Need for bedding

Calves kept in crates are given no straw or other bedding material. The reason for this is that if the calves ate the straw their flesh might deepen in colour, whereas many consumers want ‘white veal’.

Veal crates always have slatted floors to allow faeces and urine to drain away. These slats frequently become slippery and this leads to calves encountering difficulties in lying down and standing up. The SVC Report added that lameness, and claw and leg disorders may be caused by hard and slippery floors (page 62). The SVC

recommended that calves be supplied with appropriate bedding, for example straw (Conclusion 18).

SVC Conclusions on the veal crate

The SVC concluded that the welfare of calves kept in veal crates is very poor:

“The welfare of calves is very poor when they are kept in small individual pens with insufficient room for comfortable lying, no direct social contact and no bedding or other material to manipulate” (Conclusion 10).

Regarding tethering, the SVC stated that:

“Tethering always causes problems for calves ... Individually housed calves should not be tethered” (Conclusion 11).

The SVC made it clear that group-housing is the preferred system:

“In order to provide an environment which is adequate for exercise, exploration and free social interaction, calves should be kept in groups” (Conclusion 15).

Indeed the SVC went even further, saying that:

“The best conditions for rearing young calves involve leaving the calf with the mother in a circumstance where the calf can suckle and can subsequently graze and interact with other calves” (Conclusion 4).

Incidence of disease

Some supporters of the continued use of the veal crate have sought to argue that the incidence of certain diseases is lower among crated calves. We do not believe that this is the case. Indeed Professor John Webster, Professor of Animal Husbandry at the University of Bristol, has said that:

“The incidence of infectious disease [in veal crate units] is high and often kept under control only by liberal and repeated administration of antibiotics” (In “Improved husbandry systems for calves” by Webster J., Saville C. and Welchman D., 1985).

Moreover, Professor Donald Broom, Professor of Animal Welfare at the University of Cambridge, has stated that, in general, calves kept in crates have to be given extra medication to ensure that they are going to survive.

The SVC concluded that good husbandry *“is needed to minimise disease in group housing conditions but results that are as good as those from individual housing can be obtained”* (Conclusion 12).

Unhealthy diet

In natural conditions, from about two weeks of age, calves would begin to eat grass and the rumination process would start. In order to achieve the ‘white veal’ prized by some consumers, many of the calves kept in the veal crate system are never given solid food at all. They are fed on a liquid milk replacer.

In his paper referred to earlier, Professor John Webster condemned this all-liquid diet, stating that *“it completely distorts the normal development of the rumen”* (the calf’s stomach system). In a desperate attempt to get solid food the calves often lick the parts of their bodies they can reach and swallow their own hair. Hair balls then accumulate in the rumen and can cause a mechanical obstruction to digestion.

The SVC pointed out that calves *“fed on a milk diet with no solid feed [the diet given to most crated calves] would die before adulthood so it is clear that such a diet is not sufficient for healthy growth”* (page 23). In other words, crated calves are being fed a lethal diet which would eventually kill them if they were not slaughtered first.

In a further attempt to keep the flesh pale, the iron content of the calves’ feed is kept low. Low iron levels are associated with reduced fitness, vulnerability to disease and increased susceptibility to stress. Newborn calves have limited iron resources and the iron content of milk itself is low. In natural conditions calves would start to obtain iron from grasses or other solid food.

The SVC concluded that calves which are given a diet which is deficient in iron and, for calves older than four weeks, deficient in roughage (i.e. the diet which is commonplace in the veal crate system):

“can have serious health problems, can show serious abnormalities of behaviour, and can have substantial abnormalities in gut development”
(Conclusion 20).

Recommendations

Compassion in World Farming believes that:

- a) The use of the veal crate should be prohibited and that calves should be housed in groups (except where sick animals need to be isolated) or left with their mother.
- b) All calves should be given a sufficient quantity of solid food (i.e. palatable and digestible long fibre roughage) and dietary iron to maintain good health.

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