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CHEAP FOOD - WHO PAYS THE PRICE?

COMPASSION IN WORLD FARMING TRUST'S ACTION PLAN FOR THE REFORM OF MODERN AGRICULTURE

Compassion in World Farming Trust (CIWF Trust) believes that once the foot-and-mouth crisis is over, there must be a thorough review of certain modern farming practices and that major reforms should be introduced. Indeed, the Prime Minister has stressed the need for a fundamental review of industrial agriculture. CIWF Trust believes that the following 7-point action plan needs to be adopted in order to stop the repeated crises which afflict British agriculture and to introduce farming methods which are healthier and more humane:

1. The long journeys to slaughter must be ended

It is not yet known for certain how foot-and-mouth entered the UK. It is, however, clear that a major factor in spreading the disease has been the practice of sending animals on lengthy journeys to slaughter. This not only imposes suffering on the animals, but risks spreading disease.

If we want to end the lengthy journeys to slaughter, the following steps are needed:

- * local abattoirs must be re-opened
- * supermarkets must be persuaded to alter the policy whereby often they will only source their meat from a small number of large abattoirs. This policy inevitably means that animals have to be transported long distances to those abattoirs. Supermarkets must change their policy to be willing, despite any inconvenience to them, to source their meat from local abattoirs up and down the country.

2. **The use of livestock markets should be reduced and multiple journeys ended**

Disease can also be spread at markets. If the animals from, say 10 farms, are sent to a particular market and the animals from one of those farms carry an infectious disease, that disease may be spread among the animals from all the farms.

Markets are not a necessary part of the way in which animals are sent from farm to slaughter. There is no reason why animals should not be transported *directly* from the farm to the abattoir. This is already the case for most pigs and should become the norm for cattle and sheep too.

A major cause in the very rapid and wide-ranging spread of foot-and-mouth was the fact that many animals, particularly sheep, are moved several times in just a few days in and out of markets, dealer's premises and collection points. Some animals are sent to a second market very soon after being sold at a first market. Indeed, in some cases they may even be quickly sent to a third market. These multiple journeys and repeated loadings and unloadings are highly stressful and can be instrumental in the widespread transmission of disease.

CIWF Trust believes that these multiple journeys in quick succession of one another should be ended. We believe that a 20-day 'standstill' period should be introduced under which no farm animal could be moved:

- i) during the 20 days immediately following a journey, or
- ii) within 20 days of another animal being moved onto the premises on which it is located.

The thinking behind this is that during the 20-day standstill period the animal would begin to show symptoms if it harboured a disease.

3. **An end to live animal exports**

One of the sheep farms in Devon that was affected early on by foot-and-mouth was exporting live sheep to the continent. The UK exports just under one million sheep a year for slaughter abroad, many of the animals being sent all the way to Italy and Greece. This trade is cruel – the animals are often in a pitiful condition by the time they reach southern Europe – and risks transmitting disease across Europe.

Indeed, it is the live export trade which transmitted foot-and-mouth to France and the Netherlands. UK sheep took the disease into France and Irish calves brought it to the Netherlands. The Irish calves were shipped to northern France, where they stopped at the same resting place as some UK sheep, who later turned out to have foot-and-mouth. The Irish calves contracted the disease from the UK sheep and were then sent to the Netherlands, so taking the disease into that country.

The problems of long distance transport are not confined to the export of animals from the UK. The whole of Europe is criss-crossed by these long cruel journeys. Each year over a million pigs are sent from the Netherlands to Spain and Italy, while hundreds of thousands of cattle a year are exported from Germany and Ireland to Italy and Spain. Similarly, over 100,000 horses are sent each year from Poland and Lithuania for slaughter in Italy.

Packed into overcrowded trucks, often without water or proper ventilation, the animals suffer terribly during these long journeys. They become increasingly exhausted, dehydrated and stressed. Some get injured, while others collapse on to the floor of the truck where they risk being trampled by their companions. In the worst cases, many die.

Much of the suffering involved in the live trade could be ended if animals were slaughtered near the farm of rearing, with the meat being transported to wherever it is wanted.

Three key steps are needed to end the suffering of long distance transport:

- * Animals should be slaughtered near the farm of rearing. The transport of sheep all the way from the UK for slaughter in Greece or of pigs from the Netherlands to Italian abattoirs has no legitimate place in an ethically-based model of agriculture.
- ?? Animals should be fattened reasonably near to the farm on which they have been born and reared for the early part of their life. It is not acceptable for cattle to be sent all the way from Ireland and Germany to be fattened in Spain or Italy or for piglets to be transported on long journeys from the Netherlands for fattening in Spain.
- ?? The payment of subsidies (export refunds) on the export of live EU cattle to the Middle East and North Africa should be ended. It is ethically unacceptable for taxpayers' money to be used to encourage a trade which routinely inflicts great suffering on animals.

CIWF Trust believes that live exports should be brought to an end on a permanent basis.

4. **Industrial farming methods in the pig and poultry industries should be ended**

CIWF Trust is not suggesting that the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease was caused by industrial agriculture. Nonetheless, if we want to break the cycle of the periodic crises faced by UK agriculture, we need to end the industrial methods which dominate the pig and poultry industries in the UK and the rest of Europe. These industrial methods are cruel and in our view make animals more susceptible to disease.

When animals are packed into overcrowded, often unhygienic sheds, it is hardly surprising that they are unhealthy and harbour disease. The overcrowded, barren conditions, together with the fact that the animals are unable to carry out most of their natural behaviour, means that they are highly stressed; this leads to their immune systems being compromised, so making them more vulnerable to disease. Moreover, once disease enters an overcrowded shed, it is likely to spread very rapidly.

CIWF Trust is deeply concerned about the very poor welfare conditions on many pig and poultry farms. Scientific research shows that in natural conditions pigs spend 75% of their daylight hours in activities – rooting, foraging and exploring. No such activities are possible for most of the pigs fattened for meat as the majority are factory farmed. They are kept in barren overcrowded, sometimes unhygienic indoor pens. Often they are given no straw; instead they are kept on bare concrete or slatted floors. Often they are kept in old, damp, poorly ventilated, poorly insulated buildings – a perfect recipe for respiratory disease.

Unable to perform their natural behaviours, the pigs sometimes turn to the only other ‘thing’ in their world: the tails of other pigs. Out of boredom and frustration, they begin to bite those tails. The science shows that the right way to prevent tail-biting is to keep the pigs in good conditions. What factory farmers do is to slice off part of the tail with pliers or a hot docking iron, even though such routine tail-docking is illegal.

Most broilers – the chickens reared for their meat – are pushed to grow so quickly that their legs often buckle under the strain of supporting their bodies and, as a result, millions a year suffer from painful leg deformities. Their lungs and heart also fail to keep pace with the rapid body growth. This leads to millions dying each year of heart failure. Most egg-laying hens are still kept in battery cages which are so tiny that they cannot even spread their wings.

5. **The need to question our cheap food policy**

If we want change, we have to let go of the cheap food policy, which is what has fuelled industrial agriculture. The cost of changing to better systems is often exaggerated. Introducing more humane and healthier systems, would add just a few pence a week to each person's food bill, provided that the supermarkets did not charge excessive prices for this better quality food. In short, there is a cost implication in moving away from factory farming, although it is not as great as often feared.

CIWF Trust believes that as responsible consumers we should be willing to pay the little bit extra needed so that animals can be kept in kinder and healthier systems. We are, in general, a reasonably wealthy society. We can afford the lottery, holidays abroad, a range of luxuries. Are we really saying that we cannot afford decent standards of farm animal welfare? That said, there are some people for whom every penny counts. The answer to their situation is not to continue with factory farming, but to adopt social policies designed to ensure that everyone can afford food which is safe, nutritious and humane.

People would have a healthier diet if they were to replace some of their meat consumption with fruit and vegetables, which are cheaper than meat. Eating too much red meat is associated with an increase in the incidence of certain cancers, heart disease and obesity.

Today we spend only 17% of our income on food, whereas around 50 years ago the figure was over 30%. So, the suggestion that we spend a little more on our food comes at a time when food is costing us less as a proportion of overall expenditure than ever before. The dramatic fall in the proportion of our income spent on food has in part been achieved by the use of husbandry systems with very poor welfare. If we were willing to slightly increase the 17% of our income spent on food (perhaps to 17.5%) we could easily afford to introduce humane production methods.

6. **Reform of the CAP: humane farming should be adopted as a central objective of the CAP**

As taxpayers, we should insist that part of the over 40 billion Euros (£25 billion) spent each year by the UK and the rest of the EU on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is used to help farmers move away from industrial agriculture. At present, much of the CAP budget goes to support undesirable farming methods. CIWF Trust believes that part of the CAP expenditure should be redirected to introduce more natural and more humane systems. It

is true that very little CAP money is currently spent on the pig and poultry industries, where most of the problems of industrial farming are to be found. We believe, however, that that should change and that those industries should be helped to introduce better methods. We wish to stress that we are not suggesting that more money should be spent on the CAP, but rather that the existing money should be used more wisely.

The CAP's Rural Development Regulation already permits Member States to assist farmers with the capital costs of moving to higher welfare systems. At present, however, few or no Member States help in this way.

The CAP must be reformed to include, alongside the agri-environment measures, a strong *Farm Animal Welfare Scheme* requiring the Commission and the Member States to assist producers not just with the capital costs involved in changing from intensive to humane systems but, for a transitional period of around 5 years, with the additional running costs. It is the transitional period which is the most vulnerable for any business which embarks on fundamental change.

If, as consumers, we were willing to pay a little more for our food and, as taxpayers, to insist on reform of the CAP, we would achieve the following benefits:

- * Fewer food scares – safer food
- * Better animal welfare
- * A reduction in environmental pollution
- * More jobs in the countryside which, at a time of high rural unemployment, would be welcome.

7. **Reform of the World Trade Organisation rules**

Probably the biggest obstacle to attempts by the EU to introduce a better agriculture are the free trade rules of the WTO. Under those rules, even though the EU can ban a farming system on welfare grounds in its own territory, it cannot necessarily ban the *import* of meat or eggs derived from animals reared in that system in non-EU countries. This acts as a major deterrent to the EU going ahead with its own ban as its farmers may be undermined by cheap, low-welfare imports.

We believe the WTO rules must be reformed to allow the EU to apply the same standards to imports as it does to its own farmers. It is unacceptable that trade liberalisation should be given a higher priority than other legitimate concerns such as food safety, animal welfare and the environment. The free trade rules must be revised to end their detrimental impact on EU attempts to introduce an agriculture which is safe, sustainable and humane.

Slaughter

People are rightly shocked at the sheer number of animals being slaughtered in connection with the foot-and-mouth crisis. People have also, again rightly, been extremely unhappy about the slaughter methods being used, which all too often have been inhumane.

Once the crisis is over, CIWF Trust hopes the public will be aware that issues about the quantity of animals slaughtered by a modern society and whether they are being slaughtered humanely have not gone away. Instead, they have simply gone indoors, out of our sight but, CIWF Trust hopes, not out of our mind.

Each day in normal (non-FMD times), around 100,000 cattle, sheep and pigs are slaughtered for food in the UK, as well as 2 million chickens a day. No one ever asks whether these animals are being slaughtered humanely. Sadly, often they are not, largely because animals are hustled through modern abattoirs at such great speeds that it is very difficult to safeguard their welfare. A modern abattoir slaughters pigs and sheep at the rate of 300 an hour and chickens at the rate of up to 200 a minute.

The EU as a whole slaughters 300 million cattle, sheep and pigs each year. That amounts to over 800,000 each and every day.

We hope that people will remember the sheer size of the UK and Europe's slaughter and insist on reforms to the way animals are slaughtered. As indicated earlier, many of the welfare problems at slaughter stem from the great speed at which modern abattoirs work. As a result of this and other factors, many animals suffer terribly during the slaughter process. Some even regain consciousness from the stun either before or after throat-cutting. This can arise because the stun is ineffective (e.g. too little electric current may be used or the stunning tongs may be placed in the wrong head position) or because too long a time gap is allowed to elapse between stunning and throat-cutting or because throat-cutting is ineffective – if both carotid arteries (or the vessels from which they arise) are not severed, the animal will take longer than necessary to bleed to death. CIWF Trust believes that urgent reforms to slaughter practice are needed to address these serious welfare problems.

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