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COMPASSION IN WORLD FARMING SAYS

A MATURE SOCIETY SHOULD END FACTORY FARMING

The recent report by the Commission on the Future of Farming is complacent in almost completely ignoring the subject of farm animal welfare. The Commission tries to pretend that poor welfare is the responsibility of just a few rogue farmers and fails to acknowledge that animal suffering is *inherent* in the intensive systems which are commonplace in the pig and poultry industries.

Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) believes that the widely-discussed reform of farming which is now being widely discussed must lead to high standards of animal welfare being woven into the fabric of agriculture so that we can go forward with a farming which is no longer tainted by widespread animal suffering.

Factory farming

Breeding sows have benefited from the ban on sow stalls and tethers. However, most of the pigs reared for their meat continue to be factory farmed. The majority are kept indoors throughout their lives in barren, overcrowded sheds. Often they are given no straw, being kept instead on bare concrete or slatted floors. Most have part of their tails sliced off with pliers or a hot docking iron.

The battery cage for egg-laying hens will become illegal under EU law in 2012. To our dismay, however, the industry seems to be planning to replace the banned cage with the so-called 'enriched' cage which offers no worthwhile welfare benefits to hens as compared with the traditional cage.

Nor are the problems of factory farming limited to keeping animals in overcrowded or confined conditions. Selective breeding for enhanced productivity has imposed serious health problems on animals. Broilers (the chickens reared for their meat) have been pushed to reach their slaughter weight so quickly that the birds' legs, heart and lungs cannot keep pace with the rapidly growing body. As a result, each year millions suffer from painful leg disorders or die of heart failure.

Reform is essential

Reform is vital, not just to achieve improved welfare, but also to reduce the incidence of animal diseases.

Research shows that animals selected for high productivity display reduced disease resistance and poorer immune systems and so are more susceptible to disease. The poor conditions of the factory farm can also lead to ill-health. The overcrowded, barren sheds, together with the animals' inability to carry out most of their natural behaviours, means that they are highly stressed; this can lead to their immune system being compromised, so making them more vulnerable to disease. Moreover, once disease enters the overcrowded sheds, it is likely to spread very rapidly.

We in the UK and the rest of the EU pride ourselves on our civilised values. If we wish to take these seriously and behave as a mature society, we should put aside ways of producing our food which impose suffering on millions of animals. Instead we should insist on good welfare becoming an integral part of our farming.

To achieve this we need a 'total chain' approach in which all of us – farmers, consumers, retailers, food processors, caterers and government – accept our shared responsibility for introducing reforms and accept the need to change our attitude to animals.

Economics

If we want change, we have to let go of our devotion to cheap food, which is what has fuelled industrial agriculture. The cost of changing to better systems is often exaggerated. Changing to higher welfare systems often adds surprisingly little to on-farm production costs. Indeed, improved welfare leads to healthier animals and so in some cases, e.g. finishing pigs, to lower costs (reduced expenditure on veterinary medicines and lower mortality rates) and higher productivity in terms of improved growth rates and feed conversion ratios.

However, where extra costs, albeit small ones, are involved, it is essential that farmers are not asked to bear these costs alone, but instead we as consumers must be prepared to pay a little extra for our food. The key question facing us is: are we

willing to pay the small extra sums needed so that animals can be kept in more humane and healthier systems? Most of us could afford to – if we really wanted to. We are 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 animal welfare?

CAP

CIWF shares the widely held view that CAP funds must be moved away from production subsidies and instead replaced with support for Pillar II rural development measures such as environmentally sensitive production. We believe high welfare standards should now become one of the core aims of the CAP, and that welfare should be viewed as a central component of Pillar II. In particular, the CAP should offer financial support to farmers who wish to change from factory farming to more humane systems.

WTO

The WTO rules act as a major impediment to EU attempts to introduce higher standards of farm animal welfare. Under the WTO rules, the EU can prohibit a cruel rearing system in its own territory. It cannot, however, restrict the *import* of meat and eggs coming from animals reared in that system in third countries. This acts as a major deterrent to the EU pressing ahead with its own welfare reforms as its farmers risk being undermined by low welfare imports.

CIWF believes the WTO must be reformed so that when the EU adopts improved welfare standards, it is able to require imported produce to come from animals reared to standards equivalent to those required in the EU.

(953 words)

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