

STOP – LOOK – LISTEN RECOGNISING THE SENTIENCE OF FARM ANIMALS

A summary of the issues

Animals are recognised in European Union (EU) law as 'sentient beings', which means that an animal:

- is capable of being aware of its surroundings
- is aware of emotions related to its sensations
- is aware of what is happening to it
- has the ability to learn from experience
- is aware of sensations in its own body, such as pain, hunger, heat or cold
- is aware of its relations with other animals, including humans
- has the ability to distinguish and choose between different objects, animals and situations, which shows that it understands what is going on in its environment

In short, animals are aware of how they feel, where they are, who they are with, and how they are treated.

Human attitudes to animal sentience

The way that people think about animals is influenced by their upbringing, education and the fashion of their time. For instance, the French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) left a lasting influence with his opinion that animals were soulless 'machines'. But 100 years later the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) asked: "The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they talk? but Can they *suffer*?" (1) Charles Darwin (1809-1882), whose ideas underlie modern biology, also believed that it was likely that 'the mental act' in animals was similar to that in humans.



The 20th century Behaviourist school of psychology considered that behaviour alone could be studied, rather than any emotion or reasoning that might lie behind it. This has also left a lasting influence on the study of animal behaviour. However, many modern scientists who study animal behaviour, either by observation or in experiments, believe that many animals feel and think. There has been particular interest in wild animals, but some scientists are in the forefront of explaining to the public the need for farming to take account of farm animal sentience. This is important because at this moment there are some 22 billion farmed animals in the world (excluding fish). Although it may be difficult to tell exactly what animals feel, very few people still believe that animals are unfeeling and mindless machines. The challenge now is to recognise animal sentience in practice, in farming and in the many other ways we use animals for our benefit.

Pain

Psychologists usually define the pain that humans feel as an unpleasant experience affecting the senses and the emotions. Most readers will be able to identify with this.

If an animal puts its foot on a surface or object that hurts it, it will pull its leg away. A few scientists still maintain that this is only a physiological response and that the animal is not consciously aware of discomfort or pain. However, the great majority of scientists and good farmers who work with animals accept that animals consciously feel pain and should be protected from it. Birds, as well as mammals, have a complex sensory system - we must assume that conditions which cause pain to humans will also cause pain to animals. Fish have pain receptors and show similar physiological responses to painful events as people do. Some scientists also believe that there is evidence that non-vertebrates can feel pain.

In farming, animals are subjected to discomfort and pain in a number of ways. This can be caused by procedures such as mutilations, usually done without pain relief, or by rough handling. Sometimes it is the unintended result of intensive farming practices, for example in housing, breeding, feeding, handling at markets, transport and slaughter, that do not take sufficient account of the animals' capacity to suffer.

Fear, anxiety and stress

As with pain, it can be difficult to assess exactly how much animals suffer from fear and anxiety, because different species behave differently (e.g. fight or flight). But animal protection laws and commonsense agree that these emotions are an unpleasant experience and can be a cause of suffering.

Animal welfare scientists say that animals are under stress when they are in an environment which they are unable to tolerate. Repeated and/or prolonged stressful situations can cause illness and suffering in farm animals, as they can in people.

Frustration of natural behaviour

Farm animals feel and show frustration when they are prevented from carrying out natural behaviour or when they are prevented from getting something pleasant, such as food, that they expected. Animals' responses to frustration show that they are aware of what they want to do and how they expect the world to be.

Pleasure and play

Animals also enjoy positive emotions from carrying out natural behaviour. Many of the skills that all animals would need in their adult lives in nature are partly learned by play activities when young. The fact that farm animals clearly enjoy playing is a hallmark of their complex mental life.

The social behaviour of farm animals

The animals that we farm, when in natural conditions, have quite complex social lives. They need to be able to recognise different individuals (including other species, such as humans); to be aware of and understand others' behaviour; to communicate; to select a mate and to raise their young.

Experts agree that thousands of years of domestication of farm animals have changed their basic motivations and behaviour patterns very little. We have greatly underestimated farm animals' abilities to solve problems, to understand their environment and to learn.

The next section looks at how animals would choose to live in nature, and how we treat them in intensive farming.

Intensive farming

Intensive farming has developed because of the demand for cheap and plentiful meat, milk and eggs. It is how the vast majority of farm animals are reared in developed countries and is rapidly spreading throughout the world. In this system, we control what farm animals may eat, where and how they live, and their reproduction, and we often stifle their natural behaviours. Often intensive farming practices are contrary to the welfare needs of farm animals:

- Most pigs, poultry, and some dairy and beef cattle are kept indoors their whole lives
- Some animals are kept in close confinement (small, barren cages and pens)
- Animals are driven to grow faster, reproduce more frequently and be slaughtered younger
- We often keep animals together in much bigger groups than they would choose to live in, and unfamiliar animals are often brought into the group. Animals are much more likely to be aggressive and to fight in these circumstances, because they feel threatened
- When animals are crowded and confined in feedlots or indoors, smaller or weaker animals may be bullied and may not even be able to get to the feed troughs and drinkers
- Animals are sometimes handled very roughly and transported very long distances, which causes physical injury and makes them afraid.
- Animals going to slaughter can be highly stressed and the slaughter process is too often inhumane

Atlantic salmon

How would they live? In the wild the female salmon chooses a fresh water site, digs a nest with her tail, and deposits her eggs. One or more males fertilise the eggs. After hatching the fish may spend years in freshwater and when they move towards salt water, physical changes occur to allow them to survive. After spending up to 7 years in the ocean and travelling thousands of miles - alone - they return to their home freshwater to spawn. It is suggested they can 'smell' their way home.

How farming respects their sentience. Each three-quarters of a metre (2.5ft) long salmon can have less than the equivalent of a bathtub of water in a sea cage. Abnormal behaviours, injuries, deformities, disease, and high death rates are the result. Stripping eggs from females and collecting sperm from males are routinely-used processes requiring stressful handling for the fish. To prevent dominant salmon from 'bullying' or eating smaller ones, they are graded by size, a stressful experience. Infestation by sea lice is a serious welfare problem. Transport of the young fish from fresh water to sea cages also causes considerable stress. Fish farming of other species as well as salmon, is highly intensive. (2)



This farmed salmon has a deformed mouth and a humped back

Before slaughter the fish are starved for 7-10 days, whereas they have been used to frequent and plentiful feeding. When they are to be taken to slaughter, the deep cages are hauled to the surface and salmon can have difficulty in adapting quickly enough to the change in pressure. "The end result is fish which are highly stressed and exhausted."(3) Slaughter methods where the fish are conscious while suffocating or bleeding to death are in common use.

Cattle

How would they live? Cattle would naturally live in herds with a dominance hierarchy, and with specific home ranges. Young males sometimes form small groups and older males often are solitary except for the mating season. It would be rare for unknown animals to join the group. Cattle can recognise 50-70 individuals. They groom each other and have a special posture for asking to be groomed. Visual and verbal communication between cattle is important. A cow would move away from the group before giving birth to her calf and the bond between cow and calf is quickly established. The calf would suckle for at least 8 months. It would learn essential living skills from the cow and other group members.

On a very extensive organic beef farm in England, where family groups are maintained, there is evidence for mother-daughter relationships continuing well after a new calf is born. On one occasion a young cow's first calf was born dead after a difficult birth. After emergency veterinary treatment she staggered away through the fields to find her mother and the farmers found her lying at her mother's feet and being licked and apparently comforted. (4)

How farming respects their sentience. Dairy farming depends on the separation of the mother cow and her calf. A dairy cow in commercial farming is usually required to produce a calf once a year so that she will produce milk for the following 10 months. Usually the calf will be removed after 24 hours. The calf may be reared as a milking cow or for veal or beef; many male calves are killed at birth. Cows can call for days after their new calves have been removed.

Many dairy cows bred to produce high yields of milk suffer long-term pain from mastitis (infection of the udder) and lameness. Calves are often subjected to painful tail-docking, dehorning and castration, without pain relief.

Chickens

How would they live? The chickens we farm were domesticated from the Red Jungle Fowl of South East Asia. Their natural habitats are forested areas with cover and areas for roosting at night. They live in small hierarchical groups, co-ordinating daily activities. Jungle fowl and domestic chickens are believed to have over 30 different calls used to convey messages and they also communicate by postures and visual displays. A broody hen may walk a considerable distance to carefully choose a suitable, secure nest site. She would lay several eggs in the same nest and then stop laying and start incubating the clutch. The chicks start communicating with the hen and each other by peeping calls even before they are hatched.

Chickens like to dustbathe to clean their feathers, using litter material like a 'dry shampoo'. Exploratory and foraging behaviour are important for them. They use their

beak and pecking is a 'precise, high-tech activity'. Chickens would spend up to 90% of their time foraging. Hens, as well as cows, sheep and pigs, can tell individual humans apart and can learn from each other.

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Chickens like to dustbathe to clean their feathers, using litter material like a 'dry shampoo'

How farming respects their sentience. We have selectively bred chickens into 'laying hens' and 'broilers' ('meat' chickens). Laying hens in cages are deprived of carrying out nearly all their natural behaviours. Feather pecking (harmful pecking of other hens, even to death) is never seen in the wild and is a result of intensive farming practice. To prevent feather pecking, many hens in cages, and some free-range hens, have their beaks trimmed, causing lasting pain. A hen in a cage is prone to brittle and broken bones and has less floor space than an A4 piece of paper.

Meat chickens are kept in sheds so crowded that their movement and resting are disturbed and the manure-filled litter on the floor causes skin sores and air pollution. Selective breeding has resulted in painful lameness and heart disease. These birds grow so fast that they are usually slaughtered at 6 weeks old and in fact would be unlikely to survive to adulthood because of problems with their legs, hearts and lungs.

Meat chickens are often kept in very crowded sheds.



Mink

Mink are reared in small barren metal cages, then slaughtered for their fur. Being semi-aquatic they prefer to have access to water for swimming and foraging in. Experiments have been devised where mink had to 'work' for access to resources, e.g. an alternative nest or a water bath. Despite having been bred in captivity for 70 generations, they showed preference for the water bath, and when deprived of it, their stress (measured by levels of the stress hormone cortisol) was equal to having been deprived of food for 24 hours. (5)

Pigs

How would they live? In nature pigs live in small groups of sows who know each other, and their litters. Unknown sows rarely join the group. The pigs' home range would have different areas for wallowing, dunging, feeding and nests for sleeping. Pigs may recognise 20-30 individuals and greet their friends by nose to nose contact, grunting and grooming. The boar has a special 'mating song'. A sow may walk 5-10km to find an isolated, protected site to build a secure nest and give birth. She and her piglets keep contact with a variety of grunts and squeals. The piglets are gradually weaned by around 17 weeks but may stay with their mother till sexual maturity at 8-10 months. Pigs use their sensitive and versatile snouts for digging and foraging and they have an acute sense of smell. Experiments show that pigs understand what is going on in other pigs' minds and make their own decisions accordingly in order to get what they want. Previously this type of thinking has been assumed to take place only in apes and humans.



This sow could not make a nest for her piglets and cannot nurture them as she would want to do

How farming respects their sentience. In intensive farming, piglets are normally separated from their mother after 2-4 weeks and housed with piglets they do not know. If separated too early, they call their mother with frequent, distinctive squeals and in some cases appear to 'give up on

life'. Pigs kept on bare concrete or slats cannot carry out their natural foraging and exploring behaviour. Piglets kept on peat and straw are more active and less aggressive than those kept on bare concrete. Breeding sows kept outside are often nose-ringed to prevent them rooting (which digs up the land) which causes them pain if they do try to root. A sow kept in a barren pen with a concrete floor will still try to go through the motions of nest-building. Breeding boars are often kept solitary in pens and 'milked' for their semen.

Tail-docking is done in some countries to stop tail-biting, a frustration behaviour of pigs, and a result of the intensive farming of pigs in unnatural conditions. Male piglets reared for meat in many countries are also castrated. Both these mutilations cause intense and lasting pain.

Sheep

How would they live? Sheep would range in separate groups of females or of males. Female groups usually consist of several generations. Sheep are very social and isolation from the group causes stress. Experts have shown that sheep can remember 50 sheep faces for up to 2 years, and that they can also recognise animals from their profiles after they have learned to recognise them from the front view. Researchers concluded that sheep have "a highly developed requirement for social interaction and therefore a sophisticated sense of social awareness". (6)

How farming respects their sentience. Lambs are routinely tail-docked and castrated without pain-relieving drugs. Sheep in Australia are subjected to the painful procedure of 'mulesing' (where the skin around the base of the tail is cut off leaving raw flesh, to reduce fly attack) and to tooth-grinding, without pain relief. Sheep and lambs may be transported very long distances, causing them great distress – for instance there is a large trade in live animals from Australia for slaughter in the Middle East.

These panting sheep have been transported in hot weather which stresses them so severely that they may die on the journey



Progress and alternatives

There are alternatives to intensive farming systems which pay more regard to the sentience of farm animals (free-range and organic farming). In particular, pressure from some scientists and animal welfare groups has resulted in some steps towards the recognition of animal sentience in the European Union:



Piglets enjoy rooting and foraging

- **Fur farming** is prohibited in Austria and the UK
- **Routine tail-docking of piglets** is illegal in the EU
- **Broiler chickens.** The EU is about to begin the process of agreeing a Directive to regulate the welfare of broiler chickens
- **Long-distance live animal transport** for slaughter. The European Parliament has voted in favour of a maximum of 8 hours transport time, although no changes have yet been agreed
- **Sow stalls** (crates) are prohibited in the EU from 2013 (except for the first 4 weeks of pregnancy)
- **De-beaking** of hens will be prohibited from 2011 in the UK
- All **pigs** must be given sufficient manipulable material such as straw to allow natural behaviour
- **Veal crates** are illegal in the EU from January 2007 (they have been illegal in the UK since 1990)
- **Animals** are recognised as sentient beings in the European Treaty (1997)

Changes for the better are also beginning in other countries around the world.

Organic animal farming can have substantial welfare benefits and can also be better for the environment and for human health. Organic standards differ throughout the world; those of the Soil Association in the UK are considered to be among the best.

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Pigs in natural conditions spend many of their waking hours rooting and foraging

References

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 2. CIWF Trust. *In Too Deep – the welfare of intensively farmed fish*, 2002
 3. S Willoughby. *Manual of Salmonid Farming*. Fishing News Books, Blackwell Science: Oxford, 1999
 4. R Young, *The Secret Life of Cows*, advance publicity extract, Farming Books and Videos, 2003
 5. G J Mason, J Cooper and C Clarebrough, Frustrations of fur-farmed mink, *Nature* **410**: 35-36, 2001
 6. K M Kendrick, *Animal Awareness*, in J M Forbes *et al.*, (eds), *Animal Choices*, Occasional Publication No 20, BSAS, 1997, p1-7
- A full report on animal sentience, 'Stop – Look – Listen: Recognising Farm Animal Sentience' (2003), is also available from CIWF Trust.
- Multiple copies of this leaflet are available free of charge from CIWF Trust.
- Further details of the welfare issues raised in this leaflet can be found in the following publications available from CIWF Trust:
- Industrial Animal Agriculture – an illustrated summary (2003)
 - The Welfare of Broiler Chickens in the European Union (2003) (also available in French)
 - WTO – the Greatest Threat Facing Animal Protection Today (2003)
 - Farm Assurance Schemes and Animal Welfare. Can We Trust Them? (2002)
 - Laid Bare...the case against enriched cages in Europe (2002)
 - The Detrimental Impacts of Industrial Animal Agriculture (2002) (summary of report also available in English, French and Spanish)
 - The Gene and the Stable Door: biotechnology and farm animals (2002)
 - Farm Animal Genetic Engineering and Cloning – an illustrated summary (2002)
 - Chicken – how come it's so cheap? (2002)
 - In Too Deep – the welfare of intensively farmed fish (2002)
 - The Case against the Veal Crate (2001)
 - Raising the Standard: Supermarkets and Farm Animal Welfare (2001)
 - Live Exports: a cruel and archaic trade (2000)
 - The Welfare of Europe's Sows in Close Confinement Stalls (2000)
 - Animal Welfare Problems in UK Slaughterhouses (2000)
 - Brittle Bones: Osteoporosis and the Battery Cage (1999)
 - "For Their Own Good": a study of farm animal mutilations (1994)

For schools and colleges:

- Farm Animals & Us (Teacher's pack, worksheets and video)
- Campaigning for Farm Animals - Citizenship pack (Teacher's notes and Student booklet)

Further reading:

- D Griffin, *Animal Minds: from cognition to consciousness*. University of Chicago Press, 2001
- F de Waal, *The Ape and the Sushi Master*. Penguin Books, 2002
- M Bekoff, *Minding Animals, awareness, emotions, and heart*. Oxford University Press, 2002
- J Masson and S McCarthy, *When Elephants Weep; the emotional lives of animals*. Jonathan Cape, 1994
- M S Dawkins, *Through our eyes only? The search for animal consciousness*. Oxford University Press, 1998
- Visit www.animalsentience.com

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