

We, a growing group of critical veterinarians, want to express our concern about this. The conditions in intensive livestock farming have increasingly alienated the veterinary profession from its main calls: promoting animal welfare, relieving animal suffering, reporting serious shortcomings in care and respecting the intrinsic value of the animal. Intensive livestock farming has become a regular topic of discussion in society. Many citizens put mega-farms into question, challenge the legitimacy of non-stun slaughter, oppose long distance live animal transports, and care about stable fires, animal diseases, public health, and environmental degradation due to industrial animal farming. By contrast, veterinarians and their professional organisations are on the sidelines: they rarely speak out and if they do so, their statements are aimed at maintaining the status quo and protecting established interests - a recent example was the debate in the Netherlands on the separation of newborn calves from dairy cows.

### **Cheap bulk production is a challenge for the environment and farm animal welfare**

The predominant model of cheap bulk production of animal products has not only led to serious environmental problems, but is a challenge to animal welfare. The animals are adapted to the farming systems instead of vice versa. This means high stocking densities with insufficient enrichments or distractions, so that the animals must often undergo painful mutilations "for their own safety". Newborn dairy calves are separated from their mothers, calves and lambs are dehorned, sows are still kept in individual crates for prolonged periods, piglets' tails are docked and chickens's beaks are trimmed: all intrinsic breaches of animal welfare. Some of these practices - like the routine tail docking of piglets - are already legally prohibited, but are deemed necessary due to structure of the farms.

### **If on the farm things are looking grim for the animals, when they arrive at the slaughterhouse things get even worse.**

Pigs are stunned with carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), which results in horrible suffering as this gas is aversive and the pigs struggle and vocalise before losing consciousness. Chickens often reach the slaughterhouse with blisters on their breast and feet because of the high ammonia content in the bedding of the barn. During catching, fractures of the wings or legs are very frequent because the birds are crammed into the transport crates as quickly as possible. A certain percentage of deaths (the so called "DOAs" or dead on arrival) or injuries are considered normal even before the chickens reach the slaughter line.

In most countries piglets' tails are docked without pain relief. According to the Pigs Directive, this procedure cannot be carried out routinely without an annual certificate from a veterinarian showing that there is a medical need. This certificate is issued by default. Hundreds of thousands of animals are transported alive because fattening or killing the animals in one country is more profitable than in another country.

From the Netherlands, live animals (since 1 June also unweaned calves) are transported to countries where animal welfare laws hardly exist or are often violated. A veterinarian must issue a health certificate for each transport. However, no animal can be healthy enough to spend a full day in an overcrowded truck or ship with bad drinking facilities, often in the burning sun or extreme cold, sometimes even pregnant. These are some examples of practices that we, veterinarians and our professional organisations, facilitate. Sometimes with our signature, and very often with our silence".

**Financial concerns, trade flows, employment, or feeding a growing world population are not the responsibilities of veterinarians. As a profession, we must stand up for the animal.**

Economic considerations play a role for livestock farmers. Cost-effectiveness, depreciation of new equipment and investments, and financial pressure by banks and supermarkets all put a strain on farmers. But for veterinarians, the importance of the animal should be paramount. The financial interests, employment, the international trade flows and the growing world population that demands plentiful and cheap animal products are not the responsibilities of the vet. As a profession, we must stand up for the animal. We must no longer be silent, and instead oppose the current inhumane methods of keeping, transporting and slaughtering billions of animals each year.

### **The Netherlands as an example?**

The Dutch intensive livestock farming model is often mentioned as an example for the rest of the world. Our production methods are advanced, and animal welfare is better than in many other countries. But certainly the fact that animal welfare standards are worse elsewhere is no reason for satisfaction. There are absolute minimum requirements for animal welfare that are not met in our current model of livestock farming. As a 'guide country', and as one of the largest world producers of meat and dairy, the Netherlands should aim to become a real example of animal welfare and sustainability".

**We are calling for a fundamental change in livestock farming. Who else can do this if not us, veterinarians?**

This is why we are calling for a fundamental change of our livestock farming model. No pigs with amputated tails, on concrete floors, in farrowing crates, and no mega-farms. No cows that can never raise their own calf or that never graze on pasture. No chickens that reach the slaughterhouse with broken wings. No long-distance transports of live animals, let alone animals under two months. No handshake at the expense of animal welfare. And veterinarians who take care of animals above all.