

Reports and Comments

OIE global strategy on animal welfare

On the 24th May 2017 the 180 member countries of the OIE (The World Organisation for Animal Health) adopted its first global strategy on animal welfare. According to the OIE, the aim is to provide continuing direction and co-ordination to achieve “A world where the welfare of animals is respected, promoted and advanced, in ways that complement the pursuit of animal health, human well-being, socio-economic development and environmental sustainability”. The OIE recognises that animals may be legitimately kept for a range of purposes, as working animals, companion animals, used for production of food, fibre and other animal products, or for scientific and educational purposes and are transported and traded internationally. However, these purposes also carry an associated ethical responsibility to ensure that the animal uses are humane. The strategy developed by the OIE has four pillars, namely: development of animal welfare standards; capacity building and education; communication with governments, organisations and the public; and, implementation of animal welfare standards and policies. To support these into the future, the strategy describes planned activities which will include establishing a forum to: bring together members of the animal welfare research community, the global animal welfare movement and the global animal-source food sector; developing and implementing science-based animal welfare standards; encouraging and supporting the ongoing development, evolution and implementation of regional animal welfare strategies; strengthening national veterinary services; and strengthening relationships between animal welfare science and other areas of science.

OIE Global Animal Welfare Strategy (May 2017). A4, 8 pages. OIE published online. Available for download from the OIE website: http://www.oie.int/fileadmin/home/eng/Media_Center/docs/pdf/855G/AW/EN_OIE_AW_Strategy.pdf.

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The Farm Animal Welfare Committee has published two Reports to inform Government within the United Kingdom

Within England, Scotland and Wales the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) acts as an advisory body to Government, and others, and periodically publishes independent Reports that cover issues considered important to the welfare of farmed animals. FAWC believes that all farmed animals should have “a life worth living” and increasingly “a good life”. In February 2017, FAWC published two Reports.

FAWC Opinion on the links between the health and well-being of farmers and farm animal welfare

Stockmanship is considered to be one of the most important factors directly affecting farm animal welfare. In 2007, the Farm Animal Welfare Council wrote that: “In any production system, the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitude of the stockman are integral to the standard of welfare. Good stockmanship can often compensate for deficiencies in a livestock production system but the converse is never true”.

It is therefore unsurprising that the health and well-being of farmers is likely to impact on the quality of their stockmanship which, in turn, will affect the welfare of animals in their care. A recent Opinion, published by FAWC, discusses the links and interactions between a farmer’s health and well-being and farm animal welfare.

FAWC defines health as: “the state of freedom from physical or psychological illness or injury”, and well-being is considered to: “encompass health as well as wider positive and negative aspects, including a person’s subjective impression of their life, and objective factors, such as financial security and family support”. A ‘farmer’ is regarded as the person who cares for livestock on a day-to-day basis (be that the farmer, a member of their family, or a part or full-time employed stockperson).

To explore the well-being of farmers, FAWC carried out a written consultation and held a stakeholder meeting, as well as considering relevant published literature. FAWC also drew on the findings from the Farming Community Network (FCN) Helpline. The FCN is an organisation that aims to provide pastoral and practical support to farmers through a network of volunteers — including a telephone helpline which is available every day of the year, from 0700 to 2300h.

During 2013, the FCN received 1,082 calls and animal welfare was a topic of concern in 11% of calls. General health and depression/mental health were also common concerns. Farming is a highly physical job and one in which there is risk of injury. When a farmer is physically unable to care for animals to an appropriate standard (eg through age, physical illness or injury, or depression), and if insufficient support is available, then both the farmer and animals may suffer. FAWC notes that “issues of poor animal health and welfare might be revealing of physical and mental pressures or distress in a farmer”. Where farmers are suffering from depression, suicide is a potential risk and FAWC quotes figures from a UK study that found, between 1993 and 2008, farmers were 1.5 to 2.5 times more likely to commit suicide than non-farmers.

A salient point made by FAWC is that people are often concerned that they may make a situation worse if they say something to a person whose behaviour has changed indi-