

Brief Note on Animal Welfare Agency

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Description

Sweden has a long history of detailed and progressive legislation related to animal welfare for laboratory, farm and companion animals. Previously, these issues have been the responsibility of the Swedish Board of Agriculture (SBA). As a growing proportion of the public opinion and the political establishment felt that the animal welfare related issues were not given proper attention at the SBA, a political decision was recently made to separate animal housing, management and welfare from the SBA and create an independent animal welfare agency.

Animal Welfare Agency

This Agency was formally launched on January 1st 2004. The government has commissioned the agency to improve animal welfare by evaluating, enforcing and developing legislation. The agency should consider scientific evidence when writing new legislation. Also, the agency incorporates an external animal welfare council, which, among other things, discusses ethical aspects in relation to existing or proposed legislature. The new Agency must deal with a diversity of public expectations. Animal rights groups have high expectations regarding new and stricter legislation, for example related to fur animals, while some farmers fear that production aspects may be completely lost in discussions about improving welfare standards for farm animals.

Sweden has a long history of detailed and progressive legislation related to animal welfare for laboratory, farm and companion animals. The first ban on animal abuse was issued in 1857, and in 1944 complete animal welfare legislation came into force. In many cases, the Swedish legislation stretches beyond the requirements of the EU directives for the species where the European Union has so far issued such directives.

Also, Sweden has been one of the countries emphasising animal welfare related research for many years, and the Swedish university of agricultural sciences has a tradition of research concerning applied housing and management, where veterinarians, ethologists and animal scientists work together to improve conditions for animals kept by humans. For many years, Sweden has had a system for the pre-testing of new technology, which means that any new inventions or equipment meant to be used for animal housing or handling has to be scientifically

evaluated and tested before it can be sold to farmers or other animal caretakers.

Historically these issues have been the responsibility of the Veterinary Administration and later the Swedish Board of Agriculture (SBA). As indicated by the name, the SBA is a rather large governmental authority, encompassing everything from crop production, milk quotas and EU subsidies for organic production to international trade, biosecurity and animal health. When a certain proportion of the public and parts of the political establishment felt that animal welfare related issues were not given proper attention at the SBA, a political decision was made to separate animal housing, management and welfare from the SBA and create an independent animal welfare agency. It was also decided that the new agency should incorporate a section for research animals, a field that has previously been largely organized under a completely separate agency.

The historical changes in productivity of growing farm animals and present some examples of interactive effects between animal type and nutritional regime on animal productivity. Animal growth is then described in the aspects of nutrient partitioning, which will allow for understanding of the varying responses to nutrient intake in different animal types. Potential implications of introducing novel traits into farm animals via modification of the animal's genome on nutrient utilization are discussed. Via genetic selection, substantial improvements have been made in growth potential and carcass characteristics of farm animals.

Interactions between animal genotype and nutritional regime may be better understood when animal types are characterized in aspects of nutrient partitioning. The main aspects of nutrient partitioning for growth are (1) maintenance energy and nutrient needs, (2) whole-body nutrient retention, (3) nutrient retention support costs, and (4) voluntary feed intake. In terms of nutrient retention, special consideration should be given to whole body protein deposition and the partitioning of retained energy between whole-body protein and whole-body lipid. Quantification of the main aspects of nutrient partitioning is extremely useful for estimation of nutrient requirements, for assessing the economic impact of altering feeding strategies in commercial animal production, and for the development of effective animal breeding strategies.

We analysed 15 propositions and through factor analysis we defined four factors of societal perception of animal welfare: Human Animal Hierarchy (HAH), Use of animals for Human Consumption (HC), life quality of farm animals, and Farmers' Image (FI). On average, Dutch society perceived farm animal welfare as slightly positive. We distinguished perception into the elements: values, convictions, emotional experiences (with animals and farms) and factual knowledge. Factors HAH and HC are considered as convictions in Dutch society. LQ is the only

element significantly influenced by values. Pet owners and people without farm experiences perceived FI and LQ as being less positive than people without a pet or with farm experiences. These emotional experiences with farms, farm animals and/or pets are important elements of perception. FI is the only element influenced through factual knowledge. Hence, it is important that people experience and learn what farming entails and how farm animals live, through farm visits.