TEACHING ANIMAL WELFARE IN THE LAND GRANT UNIVERSITIES1,2

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ABSTRACT

Colleges and universities have an obligation to teach the basis of animal husbandry and welfare and must prepare students so that they can respond effectively to challenges by proponents of the animal welfare and animal rights movements. Veterinary curricula must now contain formal instruction in professional ethics and humane stewardship of animals for accreditation by the American Veterinary Medical Association. It is helpful if students have an understanding of farm animal behavior, stress physiology and methods of assessing welfare prior to learning about the animal welfare/rights movement’s philosophies and issues. A review of early judicial practices, “classical” Judeo-Christian philosophy, the philosophy of Rene Descartes, Jeremy Bentham, Albert Schweitzer, and current philosophers and the entertainment media places the movements in perspective. Students should be familiar with such concepts as the mind-body controversy, equality of suffering, self-awareness or intelligence, and speciesism. After acquiring an appreciation of the basics, a knowledge of the issues facing animal agriculture and the arguments for and against each issue are necessary. Graduates of colleges of agriculture need to realize the potential effects the movements can have and take the initiative to improve the image of animal agriculture.

(Key Words: Teaching, Animal Welfare, Ethics.)

Introduction

Colleges and universities have an obligation to teach humane animal husbandry practices. Colleges and universities also need to prepare graduates to respond effectively to proponents of the animal welfare and animal rights movements. Graduates must know the issues and understand the logic and approach of opposing arguments. The animal welfare and rights issues are among the greatest challenges presently facing agriculture, and their influence will increase in magnitude in the foreseeable future.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has formalized its obligation to promote humane practices by requiring that, for accreditation, veterinary college curricula must contain formal instruction in professional ethics and humane stewardship of animals (AVMA Council of Education, 1988). Although students in colleges of agriculture usually are taught humane stewardship of animals in their livestock production courses, many students receive little, if any, exposure to animal welfare/rights issues and groups. Colleges and universities that have not already done so should consider including this subject in their undergraduate and graduate curriculum.

An important prerequisite for discussions on animal welfare is an understanding of animal behavior, especially because most welfare issues in the agricultural area are directly related to behavior. Also, knowledge of psychological and physiological stress concepts, and their relationship to animal welfare, health and productivity is important. Students need to realize that animals respond physiologically and behaviorally to acute and chronic

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stressors, and that those responses (e.g., endocrine changes, disease incidence, production, growth rate, reproduction, stereotypies, play behavior) can be used to assess welfare. There are a number of reviews available on the subject (e.g., Friend, 1980; Stott, 1981; Banks, 1982; Moberg, 1985). Equally important, however, is the realization that not all stress should be avoided. As Selye (1973) stated, "Complete freedom from stress is death."

Understanding the Movement

Students need to be introduced to the philosophies and theologies that helped shape how mainstream North American society currently relates to animals, including those listed below. A knowledge of philosophy is extremely important in discussing animal welfare and rights because they are essentially philosophical issues.

1. Early Judicial Practices. Practices such as placing animals on trial in Europe were especially common from the 13th through the 19th century (Evans, 1906). The animals were often dressed in human clothing during the trial, subsequent torture and execution. Animals had "rights" under the law and the owners of animals who committed a "crime" usually were not responsible for the animal's actions, in contrast to our current judicial system. (The section on legislation outlines some more recent developments.)

2. Judeo-Christian Philosophy. Selected verses from The Holy Bible (1788) are very important, e.g., "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'" (Genesis 1:26), or "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal" (Proverbs 12:10). The writings of theologians such as Father Joseph Rickaby (1901) also are of interest. He advocated the philosophy that humans have no more duties of charity to the lower animals than to inanimate objects; however, animals should not be subjected to deliberate cruelty for amusement because it predisposes humans to be cruel to other humans. Andrew Linzey's (1987) review, Christianity and the Rights of Animals, however, took a very pro-animal stand.

3. Rene Descartes' "Animal Machine Theory". Descartes reinforced and increased the separation between man and other animals with his assertion that the body is a machine and that what sets man apart from the "animal machines" is the lack of "true speech" and "reason" in nonhuman animals (Descartes, 1649). Followers of Descartes were known to kick their dogs just to hear the machine "creak."

4. Jeremy Bentham's Philosophy. Bentham often is considered the founder of the animal rights movement. He wrote that "the day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny. . . . The question is not, Can they reason?, nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?" (Bentham, 1789). The writings of Bentham and Descartes are especially useful because they impress on students that the animal rights debate has continued for over 200 years.

5. Albert Schweitzer's Ethic of Reverence for Life. Reverence for Life calls for all life to be treated with respect (Schweitzer, 1965). It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that animals are treated humanely, be they pets, subjects in biomedical research or cattle destined for slaughter. It is important to expose students to this philosophy because it offers the students who have been influenced by the animal rights philosophy a moderate approach with which they can readily identify.

6. Portrayal of Animals in the Entertainment Media. Starting with Walt Disney's Bambi in 1942, the entertainment media have had a sizeable effect on the impression young people have of certain practices, or of animals. Pee-Wee Herman's laboratory assistant and confidant in Big Top Pee-Wee, released in 1988, is a talking pig named Vance, who also wears a lab coat.

Students should realize that the philosophical base of the movements is not new. Although modern philosophers, such as Peter Singer (1975) and Tom Regan (1983), are important catalysts, many of the same arguments made over 200 years ago (e.g., Bentham, 1789) are the basis of the modern movements. What has changed, however, is a tremendous reduction in the number of people...
involved in animal agriculture and a marked increase in our scientific knowledge of animal communication and perception (e.g., Griffin, 1981).

The animal welfare and rights "movements", then, can be presented by giving students a brief understanding of some of the philosophical arguments that are their basis, including the following:

1) Mind-body – If the body of animals are similar enough to that of humans to use for use in medical experiments, could their minds also be similar to the extent that animals should be granted "some" rights?; 2) Equality of suffering – Mental capacities of an animal do not matter; suffering is counted equally (Bentham, 1789; Singer, 1975); 3) Self-awareness or intelligence – If possessing a higher degree of intelligence does not entitle one human to use another for his own ends, how can it entitle humans to exploit nonhumans for the same purpose? (Bentham, 1789; Singer, 1975); and 4) Speciesism – Placing the interest of one's species above the interests of another species (Richard Ryder in Singer, 1975). A number of critiques of these concepts are available (Cohen, 1986; Lehman, 1988).

The differences between the animal welfare and the animal rights concepts should be explained to students. Animal welfare allows for compromises to be made; that is, the welfare of one animal can be weighed against the welfare of another for a particular situation. Animal rights is an absolute term, in that once an animal is granted a right, it cannot be violated. Although the term "animal rights" is often associated with an extreme position, a right could be as simple as the right to humane slaughter, a right already guaranteed by law.

In presentations to agricultural students, a brief overview of some of the non-livestock animal welfare concerns (e.g., hunting, trapping, cosmetics testing, biomedical research) usually is helpful. A more detailed overview may then be presented of concerns of animal welfare groups related to the livestock industry (e.g., handling, transportation, long-term confinement with restricted movement, crowding, and isolated incidences of cruelty). Animal agriculture has long been subjected to scrutiny. For example, the United States' first federal law to prevent cruelty to animals, which regulated transportation of cattle, sheep and swine, was enacted in 1873. However, present-day production methods received relatively little attention until Ruth Harrison published Animal Machines – The New Factory Farming Industry in 1964. Her concerns have since been re-kindled many times (Singer, 1975; Mason and Singer, 1980; Fox, 1984).

The CBS new show 20/20 episode "Animal Rights," broadcast in 1981, is extremely useful because it surveys the major concerns of animal welfare groups. Stopping the tape at the end of each segment allows for discussion of whether what CBS portrayed is typical of the industry, and of the advantages and disadvantages of the alternatives. Examining both sides of the concerns, for example, maintaining veal calves or farrowing sows in confinement, also serves as an excellent review of animal husbandry. Students also need to realize that real-world economic considerations dictate that most of our livestock be maintained in less than the most ideal conditions.

The goals of people involved in the movements range from promotion of humane production systems, to vegetarianism, to even "veganism." Vegans abstain from using any animal products, including eggs, milk and leather, and constitute a very small, but very active and dedicated, portion of the movement. A sample of animal welfare/rights groups promoting their concept of "humane" animal agriculture includes the following:

1) Farm Animal Concerns Trust, Chicago, contracts with farmers to produce veal and eggs under a strict set of standards and markets the products under its own brand name; 2) Animal Welfare Institute, Washington, DC., certifies products from farms produced according to a strict set of standards; 3) Humane Society of the United States, Washington, DC., has developed and promotes a set of recommended humane standards for raising livestock, poultry and dairy cattle; and 4) Humane Farming Association, San Francisco, CA, certifies veal produced according to a strict set of standards. A sample of animal welfare/rights groups that are associated with promoting vegetarianism includes the following: 1) Farm Animal Reform Movement, Washington, DC., promotes animal rights and vegetarianism; 2) People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Washington, DC., promotes animal rights and vegetarianism; 3) American Vegan Society, Malaga, NJ, promotes complete abstinence from animal products; and 4) Animal Liberation Front, believed to be many small secretive groups. Many break-ins and an
occasional case of arson of laboratories and businesses related to animal agriculture have been attributed to members of the latter group.

Students need to be introduced to some of the methods the groups use to achieve their goals, including examples of skillful use of the media, write-in campaigns, advertisements, demonstrations, debates, and "raids" by the Animal Liberation Front or other groups. It is important that students be impressed with examples of how the nonagricultural public reacts to statements from activists. A recent California study found that the large majority of consumers (70%) believe that animal welfare groups play an important role in assuring proper treatment of animals raised for food and are a credible source of information about animal treatment (California Beef Council, 1989). One of the classic examples of the power of news media coverage to effect change was the February 4, 1966 Life magazine article on the abuse of dogs by dealers who supplied the animals to laboratories. That article caused Congress to receive more mail on the then pending Laboratory Animal Welfare Act than had been received on civil rights or Vietnam (Stevens, 1978). Viewing the news series produced by Steve Wilson in 1986 titled "Misery on the Menu" prompted congressman Charles Bennett of Florida to sponsor the 1987 Veal Calf Protection Act (H.R. 2859).

An examination of the attempts by various agricultural groups at defending certain practices impresses students with the need to know the issues. Some of the industries' attempts have been very productive, such as the National Live Stock and Meat Board's "Ad press students, such as the sow that farrowed outdoors in the rain and cold and all her piglets died (page 18, Archbold, 1989), whereas students find the caption "Most veal calves are kept in individual stalls similar to a baby's crib" (page 15, Archbold, 1989) to be amusing. The American Farm Bureau Federation pamphlet Farm Animals (1981) makes some very good points, but its discussion of the castration issue misses the point of concern by animal welfare groups:

Castration is a useful practice in the livestock industry. It improves meat quality and acceptability and provides management and marketing flexibility. It helps control aggressive behavior in animals.

Animal welfare activists have expressed concern about his practice for farm animals. At the same time, they have recommended it strongly as an acceptable method of population control for pet animals [emphasis theirs].

Animal welfare activists have expressed concern largely because castration of farm animals is not performed on animals under anesthesia, whereas pet animals are anesthetized during the procedure. A better argument might be that farmers would like to use anesthesia when they have to castrate their animals, but they have found the use of anesthetics on large ruminant animals often to be counterproductive. Not using anesthetics for such simple and fast surgery greatly reduces the complications caused by the anesthetics. General anesthesia is much more difficult to administer to ruminant animals because they are subject to bloating as well as other complications. If given local anesthesia, the animal would be subjected to much longer restraint and the resulting stress due to the extra time required to administer the anesthesia and the waiting period until it takes effect. In addition, showing excerpts from the animal welfare film The Other Side of the Fence (1988) followed by Our Side of the Fence (1989), stimulates much discussion on use of the media.

Requiring students to bring a popular magazine or newspaper article dealing with the animal welfare/rights controversy can aid in discussion of those concerns. Polling the students in regard to the types of concerns their articles address broadens the discussion. When polled in regard to whether their article was polarizing in nature or called for compromise from the supporters of its side of the issues, virtually all of the articles from both sides of the debate seem to be equally inflammatory and polarizing.

Legislation

European

Students should be introduced to some of the more interesting existing and pending European laws. This helps put the situation in
the United States in perspective. For example, most European countries had humane slaughter laws by the 1930s; the United States’ first Federal Humane Slaughter Act went into effect in 1960. The European experience also is important to illustrate some of the problems associated with legislating animal welfare. The sweeping Swedish Animal Protection Act of 1988 is especially relevant. Although Swedish farmers, for example, are forbidden from maintaining sows in tethers and must provide their sows with separate feeding, voiding and bedding areas, some observers have reported that certain sows are now in worse conditions. On poorly managed farms, sows often are not provided adequate bedding and(or) shelter during periods of adverse weather, something that was not a typical problem when the sows were tethered indoors in very standardized facilities. In Switzerland, the politically strong small family farmers have supported welfare regulations that work against intensive systems (Gulther and Curtis, 1983). Cooper (1987) published a recent review that summarizes European animal welfare laws.

United States

Existing United States legislation, including the Twenty-Eight Hour Law of 1906, the Humane Slaughter Act of 1958, the Laboratory Animal Welfare Act of 1966, and the Horse Protection Act of 1970 to prevent the soring of Tennessee Walking Horses, and their major amendments should be reviewed. Animals and Their Legal Rights (Leavitt, 1978) is an excellent review of United States federal and state laws that also contains a review (from the author’s perspective) of events that led to the passage of the major laws.

A large amount of legislation is introduced each year by legislators who respond to local supporters, whether they are animal welfare or farmer/industry groups. Lacking broad support, many of those bills have little chance of becoming law. Clingerman et al. (1988) reviewed bills and public laws that were introduced from 1980 to 1988. Students are very interested in pending legislation, especially if a bill sets a precedent or appears to be gathering support. An excellent source of current information is the National Agricultural Library’s Animal Welfare Information Center, in Beltsville, MD.

State

New York was the first state to enact an anti-cruelty law, in 1828 (Leavitt, 1978). One of the United State’s first child abuse cases as prosecuted in 1874 in New York under the State’s animal cruelty statutes. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was asked to bring charges against Mary Connolly, who was sentenced to prison for one year for abusing, beating and mutilating 10-year-old Mary Ellen. Partly because of that case, a separate body of law was established to protect the rights of children. The Texas anti-cruelty law governing animals was enacted in 1856.

All states have anti-cruelty laws governing animals that contain qualifying words or phrases (e.g., “knowingly or recklessly,” “intentionally” or “unnecessarily”) preceding the definition of cruelty (Leavitt, 1978). Trials thus are necessary to determine the applicability of the law to particular situations. The interpretation and enforcement of such laws very significantly from one community to another within a state.

A knowledge of other major activities at the state level also can be useful. The Massachusetts “Humane Farming Initiative” referendum of 1988 is an example of how a group of activists can effectively challenge agriculture and almost succeed. Legislative activity of individual states also may be important or set a precedent, e.g., the California Veal Bill of 1988 (A.B. 2653) and 1989 (S.B. 110) that would establish a minimum width for veal calf crates (length of the calf plus 6 inches, in contrast to the present industry standard of 22 to 24 inches).

Student Viewpoints

Encouraging students to express and defend their viewpoints, especially following their exposure to the preceding material, can be very rewarding. Students usually enjoy the opportunity to voice their opinions on animal welfare issues. Discussion can be directed easily by asking students how they think animal agriculture should respond to the movements.

Conclusion

Graduates of the land grant universities need to be aware of the concerns of animal welfare/rights groups and be able to respond intelligently to criticisms by those groups.
Animal welfare will be one of the most important agricultural issues of this decade. How agriculture responds will influence the markets for our animal products, as well as significantly influence animal agriculture's political support. Students also need to understand the importance of improving animal agriculture's image whenever possible. The time may soon come when a particular practice will have to be abandoned or modified because of how it is perceived by the public, even though it may be "widely accepted" in the industry.

Literature Cited


Our Side of the Fence. 1989. [Motion picture], National Cattlemen's Association, Englewood, CO.


