

The welfare of broiler chickens

The broiler bird is the most commonly kept farm animal in the UK. Each year some 650 million of these animals are produced and eaten. The vast majority are reared intensively in, what many people would consider, overcrowded conditions. They have such a high growth rate of muscle tissue that, in some ways, they often overgrow the ability of their legs to support their bodyweight. Many of the birds consequently suffer from painful leg disorders in the latter part of their brief lives. They are collected, often in a somewhat rough manner, transported to the poultry slaughterhouse, suspended upside down on a hanging rail and stunned/killed by a sometimes inefficient electrical process. Broiler production is thus probably the biggest single animal welfare problem in the UK.

A report by Peter Stevenson on *The Welfare of Broiler Chickens* has recently been published by Compassion in World Farming Trust. It details, in a calm and largely unbiased manner, the scale and intensity of the situation. This publication will certainly help to bring to public attention the urgent need for constructive action as regards the welfare problems seemingly inherent in many parts of the broiler production industry.

The consumer has greatly benefited from the intensive production of poultry. Chicken is the cheapest meat available in the supermarket and its price per pound is often less than that charged for many vegetables. Any real welfare change in the broiler industry is probably going to mean an increase in price for the customer. But as John Webster states in his recent book *Animal Welfare: A Cool Eye Towards Eden* (Blackwell Science, 1995), 'since it is the consumer who has benefited most from the intensification of animal production, it is the consumer who will have to concede the most in order to ensure that farm animals get a fair deal.'

The Welfare of Broiler Chickens. Peter Stevenson (1995). Produced and published by Compassion in World Farming Trust (CIWFT): Petersfield. 16pp. Paperback. Obtainable from CIWFT, Charles House, 5A Charles Street, Petersfield, Hants GU32 3EH, UK (ISBN 1 900156 03 8). Price £2.50 plus postage and packaging.

Control of animal experimentation in New Zealand

In New Zealand the law states that no person can conduct any scientific research or use animals in teaching, other than in accordance with a code of ethical conduct drawn up by his or her research institute. The code must be approved by the Minister of Agriculture and one of the main requirements is that the institute must establish an Animal Ethics Committee to oversee the use of animals within that Institute. In effect animal experimentation in New Zealand is controlled by 'statutory' local animal ethical committees. This is in contrast with the UK situation where statutory control is centrally organized by the Home Office using the powers conferred on it by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. It is possible that the standards set in the two countries are very similar but are arrived at by different legal/administrative processes.

A Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes has recently been produced by the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee of the NZ Ministry of Agriculture, and has been adopted as a national code for New Zealand. The Code is largely based on the 5th edition of the successful Australian code