

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Ethics, morality and animal biotechnology

Produced by the BBSRC (Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council), this booklet provides a useful and clear overview of the ethical, moral and social issues surrounding animal biotechnology; specifically the direct manipulation of an animal's genetic makeup (genetic modification) and the new technology of nuclear transfer (transference of whole nuclei and the genes which they carry, as in the case of Dolly the sheep). It does not attempt to provide definitive answers; instead it seeks to provide readers with a philosophical and ethical grounding sufficient to allow intelligent debate on the ethical and moral issues raised by this technology. The booklet discusses intrinsic concerns that people may hold with respect to animal biotechnology, extrinsic concerns that may arise through the application of the technology, and highlights the reasoning (logical or otherwise) on which these concerns are based. Finally, it focuses on some of the animal welfare issues and ethical problems raised by the use of this technology.

This valuable booklet should help to improve the quality of discussion relating to this important and often-debated field.

Ethics, Morality and Animal Biotechnology. Roger Straughan (1999). Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council: Swindon. 25pp. Paperback. Obtainable from the publishers, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1UH (www.bbsrc.ac.uk). Free.

Farm Animal Welfare Council Annual Review 1998

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) have previously published their priorities for animal welfare research and development every 4–5 years. This report marks a shift in approach; priorities will now be published annually as part of the FAWC's annual review of achievements and activities.

The review restates FAWC's belief in the importance of a broad-based approach to research in animal welfare. They state, for example, that 'applied research on the design and management of husbandry systems must be underpinned by fundamental research on the capacity of animals to perceive and comprehend incoming sensations and then evaluate them in terms of quality of life', and on 'complex areas such as motivation, cognition or the development of welfare indices'. They call for all types of research to be supported 'even when the payback may not be immediately apparent'.

The following five categories are highlighted as areas in which FAWC would like to see research and development focused as a matter of priority: livestock breeding programmes, stocking densities, mutilations, disease and stockmanship, and technology transfer.

FAWC specifically call for the following within each of the respective categories: an urgent assessment of the welfare of different breeds of livestock and their suitability for the environment (because many of the most serious welfare problems highlighted in recent FAWC reports are associated with the effect of unbalanced genetic selection in breeding programmes and the selection for production-based criteria at the expense of welfare); more general research on stocking densities, particularly for poultry and fish; a multi-disciplinary approach (encompassing breeding and genetics) to finding ways of avoiding the need for mutilations such as tail docking in pigs and beak trimming in laying hens and turkeys; research on the prevention and control of mastitis and of lameness in cattle and sheep; and greater emphasis on the continuing education and training of those involved with livestock.

The review also reports on new initiatives. FAWC are currently gathering information for reviews on the welfare of animals at market and at slaughter. The welfare impact of farm