

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

The RSPCA and science

Each year now since 1991 the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) has produced a review of the involvement of the Society with scientific matters. The 1994 *Review* has now been published and contains an account of the research, development and technical work carried out by the RSPCA Science Division ie the Farm Animal Department, the Research Animal Department, the Wildlife Department and the RSPCA Veterinary Division. There are detailed lists of the meetings and events attended by the staff of these two divisions, of RSPCA scientific publications, of reports and papers presented during 1994 and of grants awarded to outside individuals and organizations for scientific investigatory work and for technical developments.

This is a wide-ranging, well-written, informative report and illustrates the important role that is played by sound veterinary, technical and scientific information in the advancement of animal welfare. Its style and contents do credit to the personnel of the Science and Veterinary Divisions of the RSPCA and to their parent organization.

RSPCA Science Review '94 (1995). Produced and published by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA): Horsham. 19pp. Paperback. Obtainable from the publishers, Causeway, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1HG (ISSN 0967 4640).

Gene transfer and welfare

This report provides a very easily read summary of the techniques and welfare problems involved in the creation and maintenance of transgenic farm animals. The author suggests that the motive for carrying out this type of biotechnological research is largely financial, and that there has been little regard for the welfare of the animals used. The stated view of The Compassion in World Farming Trust, given in the conclusion to the report is that 'it is unethical for us to impose suffering on other sentient beings either for monetary gain or for medical "advancement", human or nonhuman'. It is therefore not surprising that the report is categorically opposed to the genetic engineering of farm animals.

Dr O'Brien provides a useful list of the ways in which various animals' welfare has been compromised in transgenic studies, but unfortunately the report is not always balanced or accurate. It is undoubtedly true that finance is an important motive in transgenic farm animal research but it is not the only one. The use of genetically modified cattle to produce useful pharmaceutical proteins has important implications for human and animal health. Moreover, the use of transgenics to increase resistance to disease could improve farm animal welfare, providing that it is not used to increase intensification. It is unfair to the researchers to assume that they are not influenced by these considerations. In places the report is actively misleading: on page 18, a table is provided to show the numbers of animals required to produce one transgenic animal. It should have been made clear that the figures only apply to the production process and that once a true breeding homozygous strain is produced, there is no further wastage. Given these caveats, the report does highlight some very valid welfare and ethical concerns and is a contribution to the debate on the ethical use of animals.

Gene Transfer and the Welfare of Farm Animals. Tim O'Brien (1995). Compassion in World Farming Trust (CIWFT): Petersfield. 24pp. Paperback. Obtainable from CIWFT, 5A Charles Street, Petersfield, Hants GU32 3EH, UK (ISBN 1 900156 01 8). Price £2.50.