



“Everyone is responsible” – getting the message across



Under its motto “Everyone is responsible”, the First International Conference on Animal Welfare Education took place on 1–2 October. Organised by the European Commission and the Belgian Presidency of the EU, it brought together 400 academics, officials, teachers, veterinarians and NGO representatives. The aim was to widen access to information about animal welfare, and to increase awareness of the important role that education can play in improving responsible involvement.

Animal welfare in the European Union has come a long way. The first Animal Welfare Action Plan (2006–2010) did not explicitly allude to the role of education in animal welfare. Today, there is wide agreement that educating children, students and citizens is crucial in improving awareness and responsibility for animal welfare.

The Treaty of Lisbon, which came into force in December 2009, recognises animals as sentient beings, and the European Union’s 2020 strategy focuses on the crucial place of education for our future. The combination of the two in the October conference made a strong link between core political targets and responsible choices by consumers.

The conference highlighted the political importance now placed both upon animal welfare and upon education. Many innovative projects showed how, for instance, the use of open source teaching methods and the social media in improving animal welfare knowledge and responsibility. They all underlined that education is a key element in securing and improving animal welfare in the European Union.

An animal welfare strategy is taking shape

The Commission has initiated an evaluation of the current EU policy on animal welfare, looking in particular at the overall costs/benefits of animal welfare legislation. The evaluation is due to be completed in December, and will be the basis for an EU strategy on animal welfare to be adopted in December 2011.

This future strategy will assess the possibility of proposing a general EU animal welfare law, of setting up a European Network of Reference Centres, as suggested by the European Parliament. The strategy will also consider how education on animal welfare could be improved. Education is central to future EU policies for improving understanding of EU legislation on animal welfare, and for boosting the level of its acceptance and enforcement. It should, consequently, be incorporated at the heart of the future European strategy.

Involving children

As part of the First International Conference on Animal Welfare Education, the European Commission invited children to submit drawings inspired by the motto "How to Make Animals Happy". Over 1,500 children from all over the European Union participated and 10 drawings were selected. The Commission invited the winners and their parents to take part in the Conference, at which Prince Laurent of Belgium awarded them their prizes.



The drawing contest was the second Commission initiative designed to bring children closer to the issue of animal welfare. The interactive game "Farmland", started in 2008, aims at increasing awareness for animal welfare to children between 9 and 13 years old.

The winners and further information can be found on the conference website: <http://www.animalwelfare-education.eu/drawing-contest.html>

Enforcing the rules on pigs

Pigs deserve better treatment – and the EU is determined to see that its rules on pigs work effectively. So a workshop, organised in Parma, Italy, by the European Commission and Europass¹, focused achieving better implementation of EU legislation on November 11. This was the second workshop of its kind, and it built on the workshop on pig welfare that was held in Brussels in 2009.

¹ <http://www.europass.parma.it/>

Europass is an organisation working with the European Food Safety Authority in order to disseminate scientific knowledge in the Region of Parma.

The follow-up workshop was deemed necessary because Member States continue to face problems with the implementation of EU requirements. Among the improvements that have been sought to improve the welfare of pigs was the avoidance of routine tail docking, the continued use of proper enrichment material, and the insurance of adequate diets to dry pregnant sows. The upcoming implementation – in 2013 – of rules on group housing of sows and gilts was also discussed.

For further information please visit: http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/seminars/index_en.htm

International activities

Seminar on animal welfare on the farm, Santiago de Chile

The European Commission, the Chilean Agricultural and Livestock Service and the Universities of Chile organised a seminar on "Animal welfare and intensive production systems," in Santiago, the capital of Chile, on 13–14 September.

Chile has recently adopted a law on the protection of animals, and the seminar provided a good opportunity to discuss further proposals on the welfare of production animals.

The seminar took place during an important phase in Chile's legislative development in this area, as a positive trend regarding animal welfare can currently be detected in public opinion and among legislators. The seminar also represented a unique opportunity to exchange opinions, launch discussions and analyse the local and international trends in animal welfare.

For further information, please visit: http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/seminars/index_en.htm

Latest news



The Belgian Presidency focuses on animal welfare

Since it took over the rotating Presidency of the EU in July, Belgium has put two animal welfare topics on the agenda. One of the priorities selected is the castration of piglets without anaesthesia. Belgium is now leading the work on a joint declaration of principle between European consumer associations, agricultural organisations, animal welfare associations, distributors and scientists. The first meeting of the pilot group to prepare the declaration was held in Brussels on 2 September 2010. Participants agreed to pool resources in creating a partnership right along the pig-meat chain to promote alternatives at EU level.

The Belgian presidency has also initiated discussions among Member States on the welfare of dogs and cats.

The debate developed within the EU Member States identified the areas where the EU could help improving the welfare of pet animals. The priorities agreed by the Member States were fixed in a political document adopted by the Council on 29 November 2010. In this document, the Council calls the Commission to study and possibly propose options on the breeding and the EU trade of dogs and cats, their identification and registration as well as on non curative surgical interventions (except for neutralisation). It also asks to consider appropriate EU actions to promote and support education concerning responsible dog and cat ownership.



Making dog ownership more responsible in Europe

A conference on more responsible dog ownership in Europe took place in Brussels on 4–5 October. Organised by VIER PFOTEN and Istituto G. Caporale, it achieved a broad consensus among more than 100 participants from over 25 countries, representing European and national institutions, international organisations, NGOs, private sector and veterinarian organisations.

It was concluded that animal welfare is a multidisciplinary issue, embracing ethical, scientific, economic, legal and social aspects. Positive human-animal relations are an important source of comfort, social contact and cultural identification for the vast majority of European citizens, and responsible ownership is one of the most important goals.

Conclusions were also reached on canine overpopulation, notably urging a sustainable approach to stopping canine overpopulation in Europe through systematic EU-wide birth control, educational strategies and programmes. Additionally, the conference called for compulsory identification and an effective and reliable system of dog registration, not only to reunite stray dogs with their owners, but also to help prevent illegal puppy trading and to promote responsible ownership. The CAROdog website (www.carodog.eu) should be used, the conference agreed, as a platform to share information and expertise, and to launch initiatives implementing these actions.



Enforcing EU horse transport rules

A "Forum on horse transport" was held in Brussels on 29 November 2010. It was instigated by FVE – the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe – and BEVA – the British Equine Veterinary Association – and the initiative was welcomed and supported by the European Commission DG Sanco Unit Animal Welfare, the European Economic and Social Committee, and World Horse Welfare.

The Forum reviewed the enforcement of EU rules on the transport of horses for slaughter and for other

purposes. The aim was to see where practical improvements might be made, with a focus on applying current legislation, and on how vets could help protect the welfare of horses in transit. The conference looked at critical control points, effective control systems and good practices, as well as at trade flows, animal health risks, horse identification and the effects of closing horse slaughterhouses.

For further information please visit: http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/seminars/index_en.htm

Interview

Animal Welfare and Consumer Choice

Andrea Gavinelli, Head of Unit Animal Welfare, DG Health and Consumers

What is the role of consumers in animal welfare?

Today, the farming of animals is no longer viewed by European consumers simply as a means of food production. Instead, it is seen as fundamental to other key social goals, such as food safety and quality, safeguarding environmental protection, sustainability, and enhancing the quality of life in rural areas. The concern about the impact of food production on biodiversity and the life of rural populations has led to a renewed interest in 'going local' for 'quality products' that are animal-welfare friendly. This coordinated approach should be complemented by initiatives to improve consumer information and awareness.

The European Commission believes that consumers have a role in improving animal welfare through the power of informed choices. Could animal welfare labelling help consumers to identify and choose welfare-friendly products?

When it comes to animal welfare labelling, it goes without saying that transparent consumer information is key to developing trust among EU citizens. Animal welfare is frequently associated with positive values in food production. Recent social investigations in this area show that the way animals are farmed is becoming a more relevant criterion for choosing animal products. In order to guarantee that

animal welfare attributes are scientifically correct it will be important to continue investing in research in this area.

What is the role of the Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006–2010, and how is it linked to consumers?

The main objective was to make animal welfare a clear market advantage for the EU producer, while easing the frustration of citizens at not being able to distinguish products that are welfare-friendly, in particular when the products come from beyond the EU. Based on the influence that informed consumers can exert – through their purchasing behaviour – on the development of sustainable farming practices, the Action Plan suggests introducing improved marketing, labelling and communication strategies.

The future EU Strategy on Animal Welfare that is going to be adopted in 2011 will develop further on these aspects.

