POULTRY CRC PROGRAM 3A - IMPROVING POULTRY WELFARE

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Animal welfare has become a core value in western society. This common concern has its origins in an array of experiences that arouse strong sentiments but disparate individual targets for attention. It is a contributing perspective, strongly influencing views on codes of best practice and the acceptability of various animal management options. Stakeholders in the animal welfare domain thus include the public, generally as consumers, owners or concerned observers, special interest groups, businesses based on the commercial supply of animals and those developing, implementing or auditing compliance with relevant policy at government or community level. Thus, consumer and public attitudes to animal welfare have the potential to dramatically affect the use of domestic animals in society, influencing for better or for worse, medical research, the care of companion animals and the operations of livestock industries, including the poultry industries. There are examples of this community influence already occurring in the egg industry in relation to welfare. For example, the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (formerly ARMCANZ) agreed in 2001 to a number of actions relating to welfare in the egg industry, including the introduction of an industry wide QA program, labelling to identify the production system and further R&D on issues such as furnished cages. All these actions have since been implemented. Similarly, albeit in another industry, some States in the US are stopping all expansion of pig production and in Victoria expansion of poultry farms has been stopped in some areas because of both their environmental and social impacts.

Sustainable livestock production requires economic viability, ecological sustainability and social acceptability. Social acceptability comprises issues such as animal welfare, food safety, genetically modified organisms and quality of life for the farmer/stockperson. Welfare issues are likely to have their impact to varying degrees on future production practices through consumer buying behaviour and consumer and public influence on regulatory legislation, the standards set for the product by processors and retailers and international trade policy. Science has an important role in providing sound knowledge to more clearly define the criteria of fair and humane treatment of animals and promote well-informed debate on attendant issues. Better animal welfare will only occur through the product of clear thinking about one’s moral obligations, coupled with factual information about animal treatment, informed by a scientific understanding of animal welfare. However, there is serious disagreement within science on a conceptual framework of animal welfare and in turn the methodology to assess animal welfare. The Australian Poultry CRC is playing an important role in this area to develop both appropriate methodology and to provide factual information. Other CRC-funded projects include alternative housing, beak trimming, stockperson attitudes and behaviour and barriers to adopting welfare into industry QA programs.

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