

What is Animal Welfare?

Throughout the English-speaking world, the term animal welfare is taken to relate to the animal's state of doing well. The term is widely used in the United States, particularly by humane groups and the general public. The animal industries and agricultural scientists in the United States have generally chosen to use the term well-being, as a synonym for welfare, perhaps to avoid confusion with human social welfare programs. In this paper I will use both terms, but with each having slightly different meanings, to reflect two important concepts. In considerations of animal welfare, it is necessary to consider both the short-term or immediate effects of a practice on an animal, and the long-term consequences (Gonyou, 1986). I will use the term well-being to refer to the short-term or current state of an animal, and welfare to refer to its long-term status encompassing past, current and future states (Gonyou, 1993).

Animal welfare is defined in a number of ways and these definitions influence, and are influenced by, each other (Gonyou, 1993). The legal definition of animal welfare is determined by legislation and interpreted by the courts. Each country established a minimum requirement to be accepted by everyone in that society. The public definition of animal welfare is determined by the people based on their knowledge of an empathy with animals, and the influence of others on their opinions. Welfare may be defined scientifically, in new theories on the nature of animal welfare and develop new technologies to measure appropriate variables. Finally, welfare must in some way be defined by the animal itself, in terms of its satisfaction, or ability to cope, with its environment. The animal's definition of welfare may be affected by previous experience, physiological status, and genetic disposition, but the animal is unlikely to be affected by legal, public or scientific definitions. Therefore, as we seek a common definition, it is necessary to move closer to that of the animal, the central figure in the issue.

It has been stated that animal welfare includes both the physical and mental well-being of the animal (Command Paper 2836, 1965), but others have argued that welfare is entirely about the animal's mental experiences (Dawkins, 1990; Duncan and Petherick, 1991). Using this argument, an animal's well-being is only compromised if it perceives the situation as being poor. The emphasis of this approach is clearly on the animal's definition of well being. However, as our ability to assess animal feelings is currently limited, we must rely on a more pragmatic approach. Broom (1991) advocates using a variety of behavioural and physiological measures to assess the welfare status of an animal. Most of these variables relate to the effects or consequences of stress or poor well-being. Moberg (1985) suggest that after an animal perceives a stressor, its initial response is likely to be behavioral. If a behavioural response is not adequate to relieve the stressor, physiological, and eventually pre-pathological responses are made. Thus, assessments of animal welfare must emphasize perception of a stressor, and behavioral, physiological, and pre-pathological responses.

From the above discussion, it is apparent that an animal's welfare status, encompassing past, present and future well-being, would be modified if we were able to change the animal's perception of, or ability to, respond to a stressor. This predisposition to good or poor welfare is reflected in the use of vaccines. An animal may be made less susceptible to disease by vaccinations, which change its predisposition to good or poor welfare. It should be noted that the capture, restraint, and administration of a vaccine is unpleasant to the animal and impinges on its well-being, in the short term. However, in the broader context of welfare, the practice may be justified by reducing the probability of sickness in the future. The welfare implications of a

management practice must consider the animal's immediate response to the procedure and the changes to the animal's predisposition to stress in the future.