

# Animal Well-Being



A Report of the Pew  
Commission on Industrial  
Farm Animal Production



# **PCIFAP Staff Summary on the Welfare of Animals in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations**

The Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production was established by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts to the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. The two-year charge to the Commission was to study the public health, environmental, animal welfare, and rural community problems created by concentrated animal feeding operations and to recommend solutions.

Since man began raising animals for food, there have been methods of production that vary tremendously. At a time when most people raised their own animals for meat, milk, and eggs, the welfare of those animals depended very largely on the individuals in charge of their care. However, from a production-scale view, it is probable that past and present production systems utilizing mainly “extensive” systems, where animals are raised mostly outdoors and fed mainly on forage, face similar animal welfare issues in general: exposure to heat and cold, exposure to disease and predators, and possible nutritional deficits. Logic would suggest that livestock producers wishing to either eat or sell their animal products would do their best to minimize any situation that could lead to a detriment to their product, inasmuch as it was possible. In an extensive system, this might include providing protection animals, such as dogs or llamas, fences, nutritional supplements (when available), a barn or shelter, a water source or shade for cooling, and proper veterinary care and vaccination (when available). Regional differences due to weather and/or topography certainly led to adjustments in both the manner of husbandry and, particularly in the past, the species and breed of animal raised. Historically, in many communities, farmers who excelled at animal husbandry



practices were respected for their abilities.

In the past 50 years, food-animal production has changed significantly, particularly in the United States. This change has come mainly for economic reasons, as vertical integration of animal agriculture has become the norm. Subsidies on grain production made feeding animals grain produced elsewhere cheaper than feeding them grains produced on-farm. This situation influenced the movement of animal production to areas concentrated near railheads, where cheap grain could be delivered. In addition, integration in the retail sector has resulted in large companies, such as Wal-Mart and McDonald's, emerging as the main buyers of animal products. As these companies market their products, meat consumption has grown, as has demand for animal products. The result is the need for more and more consistent animal products. These factors have resulted in the current system of IFAP. In this system, animals are raised in confined conditions, where the animal welfare concerns of the past (temperature, predators, nutrition, disease) are highly regulated. However, this system may raise other, perhaps more difficult, problems related to animal welfare.

An evaluation of animal well-being must address not only the health of the animal, but also the affective state and behavior of the animal. It is in these areas that IFAP systems may be lacking. A primary concern of IFAP is the restriction of the animals' behavior due to limited space or lack of access to the resources (such as bedding materials, etc.) needed to perform particular behaviors. In some cases, the animal may be so severely confined as to eliminate even normal movement, as in the cases of gestation and restrictive

farrowing crates for sows and wire cages for layer hens. In addition, extreme concentration can lead to stress and abnormal behaviors. The use of particular breeds of animals that are high-producing has resulted in genetic problems, such as Porcine Stress Syndrome (PSS). Issues with facility design (air quality, waste treatment, physical materials present) may cause problems ranging from respiratory distress to lameness. Finally, some animal management practices (tail-docking, dehorning and beak trimming) are both acutely and chronically painful but are performed without pain relief. This report provides an overview of these and other welfare issues, as well as a discussion of the trade-offs involved in making changes to the current system, the economics of animal welfare, recent actions taken by retailers and producers to establish animal welfare standards, and a discussion of how the well-being of animals in any system is measured.

This report does not reflect the position of the Commission on these, or any other, issues. The final report, and the recommendations included in it, represents the consensus position of the Commission.



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### PCIFAP Commissioners

John Carlin, Chair  
Executive-in-residence  
Kansas State University

Michael Blackwell, DVM, MPH, Vice Chair  
Assistant Surgeon General, USPHS (ret.)  
President and CEO  
Blackwell Consulting, LLC

Brother David Andrews, CSC, JD  
Former Executive Director  
National Catholic Rural Life Conference

Fedele Bauccio, MBA  
Co-founder and CEO  
Bon Appétit Management Company

Tom Dempster  
State Senator, South Dakota

Dan Glickman, JD  
Former US Secretary of Agriculture  
Chairman and CEO  
Motion Picture Association of America

Alan M. Goldberg, PhD  
Professor  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

John Hatch, DrPH  
Kenan Professor Emeritus  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
School of Public Health

Dan Jackson  
Cattle Rancher

Frederick Kirschenmann, PhD  
Distinguished Fellow  
Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture  
Iowa State University

James Merchant, MD, DrPH  
Dean  
University of Iowa College of Public Health

Marion Nestle, PhD, MPH  
Paulette Goddard Professor  
Department of Nutrition, Food Studies,  
and Public Health  
New York University

Bill Niman  
Cattle Rancher and Founder of Niman Ranch, Inc.

Bernard Rollin, PhD  
Distinguished Professor of Philosophy  
Colorado State University

Mary Wilson, MD  
Associate Professor  
Harvard School of Public Health  
Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine  
Harvard Medical School

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#### PCIFAP Staff

Robert P. Martin  
Executive Director

Ralph Loglisci  
Communications Director

Paul Wolfe  
Policy Analyst

Emily A. McVey, PhD  
Science Director

Lisa Bertelson  
Research Associate

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