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Sarah Hendry, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, England
Chief Veterinary Officer, Scottish Government
Chief Veterinary Officer, Welsh Government

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Dear Ms Hendry, Mrs Voas and Professor Glossop,

Agricultural policy

1. In the immediate years after the Second World War, the agricultural goal was a secure food supply, which was supported by major investments in research, education and farm level support. Farmers rose to the challenge, massively increasing production and efficiency, resulting in a plentiful supply of safe affordable food, to the benefit of the consumer; a typical household currently spends 10% of its disposable income on food (about one third of that spent by its ancestors). However, nowadays there are some agricultural practices that are questioned by some.

2. With hindsight, it is clear that it took too long to adjust the agricultural goal and re-target farming to the benefit of both the environment and farm animals. Most accept that there is a balance to be sought in efficiency, competitiveness, food security, animal welfare and the environment. Farmers are increasingly being held accountable for their environmental impact and are legally responsible for the welfare of animals in their care. Steps are now being taken by both the Government and farmers to deal with climate change and other environmental problems. Legislation and self-regulation have been used to improve the welfare of farm animals.

3. The scale of human use of farm animals is vast. Annually, nearly a billion farm animals are reared in the UK, the majority of which are broiler chickens kept for meat. Of course, it is vital not to 'export' agricultural production to a third country that does not keep its farm animals to British standards.

A perfect storm

4. The Foresight Report¹ analyses the future challenges of a secure food supply. The Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Sir John Beddington, has aptly described the probable, forthcoming conjunction of food shortages, scarce water and insufficient energy resources, which are likely to cause people to flee from the worst-affected regions, as a perfect storm.

5. The Report promotes "*sustainable intensification*". Indeed, this phrase dominates the Report. Some argue that it is an oxymoron when applied to livestock, questioning its usefulness as a phrase to encapsulate the complex requirements when animals are farmed.

¹ Foresight Report 2011 The future of food and farming: challenges and choices for global sustainability. Government Office for Science

Others believe that sustainability incorporates low levels of disease and high welfare, resulting in low emissions and great efficiency.

6. Traditionally, sustainability is defined as a balance of economic, environmental and social issues. For many, farm animal welfare falls into the last area, given its links to ethics and the recognition of animals as sentient beings. For others, welfare is an important part of economic sustainability, but market failure needs to be addressed.

7. FAWC would be concerned if future food policy did not give sufficient attention to improving the welfare of farm animals; gains made over the past decades ought not be lost.

Future food policy

8. FAWC is mindful of the need to meet a growing global population's demand for more meat, eggs, milk and other livestock products. It will be difficult to meet this demand without a thriving agriculture throughout the world and careful consideration of food policies within particular countries. Given this growing demand, we must not repeat the mistakes of previous policies.

9. In our opinion:

- policies and mechanisms of sustainable intensification ought not to be pursued at the expense of current (or future) welfare standards;
- good husbandry practices and stockmanship, must not be compromised or marginalised in the pursuit of greater production; and
- development of new technologies, land management techniques, building design and genetic procedures should place the welfare of farm animals at the centre of their considerations.

10. There are clear reasons for Government to intervene to safeguard and improve farm animal welfare, notably market failure, negative animal welfare externalities and provision of public animal welfare goods. More use should be made of incentive payments or other positive inducements for farm animal welfare. These arguments are amplified in our recent report, Economics and Farm Animal Welfare, which was published in December 2011.

11. This requirement will need research focused upon the behavioural, welfare and ethical implications of future agricultural systems and new ways of producing our food.

12. It should avoid the danger that "*sustainable intensification*" will become the new hegemony, thus making it difficult for alternative systems (and arguments) to flourish.

Advice

13. . FAWC's advice is that, in pursuit of sustainable intensification, production should not be promoted at any cost. The concept of sustainability must include the welfare of farm animals. Indeed, livestock agriculture cannot be considered sustainable if an animal's life is not worth living.

Yours sincerely,



Professor C M Wathes
Chairman, Farm Animal Welfare Committee