

## COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL WELFARE

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The Committee met on October 5, 2011 at the Adam's Mark Hotel in Buffalo, New York, from 8:03 am until 12:42 pm. There were 57 members and 50 guests present. After the Chair called the meeting to order at 8:03 am, Dr. Steven Halstead, USAHA President, reviewed actions taken by the Board of Directors and Executive Committee on the Committee's 2010-recommended revisions to its Mission statement. The Chair then introduced the first speaker for the session.

### Presentations

Presentation Title: **Toward a New Morality of Animal Welfare**

Presenter & Affiliation: J. Bruce Nixon, DVM; Chief of Staff, Animal Emergency Hospital of North Texas, Dallas, Texas

Summary of presentation: From the way we are educated to the way we live our personal lives, our relationships with animals have changed profoundly. In many state universities and, in particular, land grant universities, agriculture has been a pervasive presence. Agricultural departments have been decreasing in size and influence, and most students now have either no or very little agricultural training. Neither do these students have any personal experience with agriculture as the number of farms has dramatically decreased.

The younger demographic is no stranger to having animals in their lives, however. As food animals retreated from their personal lives, companion animals moved from the pasture to the backyard and ultimately into their bedrooms. Their experiences and opinions about food animals have drifted far from where they were a few decades ago. This mentalité is more fundamentally and deeply established than a mere differing of opinion. Their understanding and approach may actually reflect a substantial and fundamental difference in world view. Differences in what individuals believe to be morally acceptable may be problematic when individual belief systems vary widely.

The industrial revolution introduced the "modern" period where the quality of life of the individual human was greatly improved because of increased cooperation, more efficient means of production, expanded mining of the earth for resources (especially energy), and increased freedom from pernicious labor. Accordingly "stuff" became much more available, pervasive and cheap. Postmodernism is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of scientific, or objective, efforts to explain reality. In the postmodern understanding, interpretation is everything; reality only comes into being through our interpretations of what the world means to us individually.

Public health, food safety and agricultural production are located in a purely modernist social geography. In contrast, the general public is becoming increasingly postmodern, especially when it comes to questions and concerns about food animal production. This conflict in views has led to an erosion of trust by the public towards those in animal agriculture. Consequently, producers are losing their ability to self-regulate and instead are facing a barrage of new regulations and legislation lobbied for by socially conscious activist groups.

Presentation Title: **Swine Welfare Issues—Beyond the Stall**

Presenter & Affiliation: John Deen, PhD, DVM, DABVP; Professor, Veterinary Epidemiology, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota

Summary of presentation: The improvement of the welfare of pigs is a central focus of swine farmers and veterinarians. It is far from being simple in approaches of dialogue, evaluation and decision-making, and many lessons have been learned as we continue to evaluate diverse concerns such as gestation housing, euthanasia methods, and transportation. However, the challenge is also to create a broader approach that is not only issue-based, but allows a broad evaluation of needs, an efficient allocation of limited resources, and a model of dialogue that develops knowledge and trust.

A useful example is a hospital or HMO. Very few of these institutions are really trusted or authority given. Instead it is the people who work inside the institutions who are trusted and expected to make extraordinary decisions regarding the health and well-being of patients. Stock persons have historically been afforded some of the same authority with regard to the health and well-being of animals. Like HMOs, farms (especially large farms) are being vilified as uncaring and profit-driven. Industrialized agriculture is a term that tries to emphasize a lack of regard for outcomes other than profit.

In discussions of welfare, the goal must be to hold onto the ability to control and improve the well-being of animals. The controversies accorded to gestational housing are indicative of the challenge. We must be able to identify those concerns that are identified by people working with swine and afford them the tools and resources to improve swine welfare or to humanely end pigs' lives. Concerns such as painful and debilitating diseases must continue to be a major focus in improving the welfare of pigs. Successes in control of disease are also usually successes in improving their well-being, though they have not been celebrated as such.

**Presentation Title: Poultry Welfare Issues**

Presenter & Affiliation: Patricia Y. "Scotti" Hester, PhD; Professor, Animal Sciences, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

Summary of presentation: Poultry includes meat-type commercial fowl (turkey and broilers) and laying hens for the production of table eggs. These commercial birds are propagated through secondary breeding stock referred to as turkey breeders, broiler breeders, and layer breeders. Welfare concerns common to all types of poultry include stocking density (overcrowding), air quality (ammonia and dust), litter quality (wet litter), seasonal environmental extremes, euthanasia, handling, depopulation, transport, and slaughter.

For poultry provided with outdoor access, protection from predation and wild bird exposure is germane to maintaining good animal welfare. These welfare issues can be averted through good management, animal caretaker training, and appropriate facility design (Dawkins et al., 2004).

With the exception of broilers, poultry in all types of housing can experience outbreaks of cannibalism and feather pecking. Broiler breeder male aggressiveness during mating can also be problematic. Morphological alterations are performed including beak, toe, and snood trimming to minimize the deleterious effects of these behavioral aberrations. Dubbing in chickens is used to prevent large combs from getting caught on equipment.

Welfare issues specific for broilers and turkeys include long day lengths and metabolic diseases such as ascites, skeletal deformities, sudden death syndrome, and immunosuppression. Feed and water restriction of broiler breeders and male turkey breeders for the purpose of maintaining optimum body weight and high fertility leads to hunger. Fasting molting regimens, which also cause hunger, are used in turkey breeders and broiler breeders when availability of genetic stock is limited.

Laying hens are susceptible to bone breakage because of osteoporosis. An additional welfare issue of laying hens is meeting their behavioral needs of nesting, dust bathing, foraging, and perching without compromising their health or biological function. Enriched colony housing units or furnished cages for laying hens are being evaluated as alternative housing that may be able to meet some of these behavioral needs and still retain some of the advantages of the conventional cage.

Dawkins, M.S., Donnelly, C.A. & Jones, T.A. (2004) Chicken welfare is influenced more by housing conditions than by stocking density. *Nature* 427: 342-344.

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~abrg/papers/dawkins/Nature.pdf>

J. S. West & Companies, Modesto, CA 95354. Live cam of hens in enriched colony housing units.  
<http://www.jswest.com/index.php/component/content/article/118>

Presentation Title: Practical Euthanasia of Livestock—A Look at the *AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia* Revision

Presenter & Affiliation: James Reynolds, DVM, MPVM; Professor, Veterinary Medicine, Western University of Health Sciences, Pomona, California.

Summary of presentation: The AVMA has nearly completed the review of the *AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia*. The final document will be published in the *Journal of the AVMA* and also will be available online. The AVMA Animal Welfare Committee will be empowered to make minor to moderate changes in the document when new research is available or as issues arise, with the approval of the Executive Board. Also, the Panel of professionals reviewing the Guidelines will continue (rather than being sunset as in the past) so that changes may be made as necessary, making this a “living” document. The presentation included specific details as to which methods were considered “acceptable,” “acceptable with conditions,” and “unacceptable” for a variety of food animal species. It was clarified that “acceptable” methods were equivalent to methods “acceptable with conditions” as long as all conditions were satisfied.

### **Committee Business**

The business meeting followed the last presentation and the presence of a quorum was confirmed. The Chair reviewed the activities of the Committee during and following its 2010 meeting in Minneapolis. The Chair then referred Committee members to the USAHA website to review the 2010 resolutions and the US Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) responses.

As a result of interim actions between annual meetings, the Executive Committee considered the recommendations of the Board of Directors and worked with the Chair to return a modified Mission Statement to the Committee for consideration. Extended discussions gave rise to multiple amendments to that modified Mission with the Committee ultimately approving the following statement:

“The USAHA Committee on Animal Welfare explores and promotes dialogue on issues related to animal use, care, and welfare in search of broad-based animal welfare recommendations. While focused on good animal welfare, the Committee recognizes that an appropriate approach to responsible animal care practices includes due consideration for food security, public health and safety, the environment, and the economic viability of animal agriculture.

The Committee seeks to present information in an honest and unbiased, science-based manner. In this capacity, the Committee serves as a forum for promoting dialogue between various animal welfare groups and industry.”

The Committee adjourned at 12:42 pm.