

Fall bill revises laws on lab use of animals

WASHINGTON — The Secretary of Agriculture has been given new directives calling for improved standards governing humane treatment of animals in research laboratories, Chairman Kika de la Garza, D-Tex., of the House of Agriculture Committee said.

The new provisions were part of the 1985 omnibus farm bill, the Food Security Act of 1985, which became law in late December. They revise an existing program of standards applying to the care and transportation of animals by dealers, exhibitors and research facilities.

"Congress approved these new animal protection provisions because we needed better standards to help meet public concerns in this area. But we acted with the understanding that the use of animals is vital in some education and research aimed at increasing knowledge about diseases and injuries which affect both humans and animals," de la Garza said.

"New testing methods which are faster and more accurate than animal experiments are being developed and can replace the traditional methods in some particular cases as they come along. But for research where we continue to need animals, the adoption of the standards set in the new law is a useful step toward assuring that necessary studies can continue," the Agriculture Committee Chairman added.

Major features of the new animal protection provisions, which become effective in December, 1986, include:

--STANDARDS AND CERTIFICATION: Existing standards for humane handling of research laboratory animals will now be required to include a specific list of minimum requirements. Among them is one stating that animal pain and distress in experimental procedures must be minimized by steps including adequate veterinary care and appropriate use of anesthetics and tranquilizers. Adequate exercise will be required for dogs, the House-Senate Conference Committee which produced the final version of the farm bill said it intends the exercise standard to include regularly allowing the dog out of its cage, using dog runs, or allowing ample room for housing. For primates, the conferees said they intend adequate exercise to mean provision of space equipped with exercise devices linked to the animals' natural instincts. And in any practice which might cause pain to animals, pre and post-surgical care by laboratory workers would be required.

--RESEARCH PLANNING: The Secretary of Agriculture will not be permitted to interfere with the planning of research projects. But every research facility using animals would be required to demonstrate that it was following

professionally acceptable standards in the care, treatment and handling of animals, and each facility would have to file an annual report on its compliance with federal standards.

--INFORMATION SERVICE: The Secretary of Agriculture is required to set up a new central information service which researchers from all across the nation could use for three purposes—(1) to record animal experiments so other scientists could avoid needless duplication of these tests; (2) - to record improved experiment methods, including methods which could reduce or eliminate the need for animals in tests and improved methods of minimizing animal pain and distress; and (3) - to get information on training laboratory employees in humane handling of animals.

--INSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEES & TRAINING: The law requires every research facility to set up an Institutional Animal Committee including at least one member who is not affiliated with the facility and at least one doctor of veterinary medicine. The committee would inspect the institution's animal study areas and animal handling practices at least twice a year to ensure compliance with federal standards as a representative of public concern for animal welfare. Every facility would be required to conduct annual training sessions for all persons involved in animal care and treatment, and this would have to include a review of methods for reporting deficiencies in animal care practices. The institutional committee members would be forbidden to release

confidential information including trade secrets, processes and financial data.

--FEDERAL INSPECTION & PENALTIES: The Agriculture Department will have to inspect every affected research facility at least once a year and, if it finds practices which do not meet standards, will have to conduct follow-up inspections until all deviations are corrected. Civil penalties authorized for violations of the Animal Welfare Act will be raised from the former \$1,000 to \$2,500; penalties for failure to obey a cease and desist order go from the former \$500 level to \$1,500; and criminal violation penalties from the old \$1,000 level to \$2,500. Also, in any case in which a federal agency funding a research project finds that animal care standards have not been met, despite notification and opportunity for correction, the agency must suspend or revoke its support.

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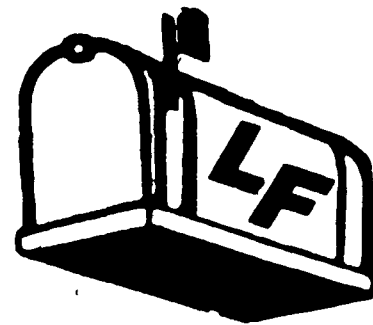
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