



### THOUGHTS ON FARM ANIMAL WELFARE

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More than 12,000 ago, wolves that approached ancient man's campfire were among the various species of animals which instinctively recognized that association with humans might increase their chances of survival and ultimately their ability to reproduce.

Domestication was a mutually beneficial process, and the interdependence that developed between man and beast still exists on farms and communities around the world.

Today, people depend on domesticated farm animals for food, fiber, and a myriad of by-products used everyday at home and work, and producers work hard to meet consumer demands for an inexpensive, wholesome food source and other quality products.

However, animal agriculture has been increasingly criticized in the last decade by certain members of society who question the practice of raising and using animals for food, fiber, and most other purposes.

Currently, 90 percent of our population live in urban and suburban areas, and only 2 percent — the farmers and ranchers — feed the entire nation. In terms of the American experience, farming has become the exception rather than the rule.

Only a century ago, most people in the United States had ties to farming and domestic livestock; they either lived in a rural area or had relatives involved in commercial agriculture. Now our population has become so removed from the practice of animal agriculture that many people no longer understand the processes by which food finds its way from the farm to the dining table. And studies have shown that the more remote the public is from an issue, the more likely they are to look to generalized mass media for information about the issue.

Inundated with information — and sometimes misinformation — from the mass media, the general public has become more health-conscious and concerned about environmental issues, the use of natural resources, and the well-being of all kinds of animals. At the same time, criticism from organized activist groups questioning the conduct of the agricultural community has increased.

Because the public has been and continues to be misled by these "animal rights" activists, the animal agricultural industry needs to become more proactive in educating the public about the facts of animal production practices.

The public needs to be informed about continuing progress in animal care and about areas being actively researched. For instance, over the years, as new knowledge and information have become available, the industry has volun-



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tarily adopted more humane handling, transportation, and slaughter techniques. Dairy cattle are now routinely provided access to exercise lots or pasture, concrete floors are grooved to reduce slipping, animals are castrated and dehorned at earlier ages, vaccinations are used to prevent disease, stray voltage on dairies is being eliminated, housing designs and space allowances for veal calves and gestating/farrowing sows are being modified, effective veterinarian-client-patient relationships are more widespread, and emphasis is being placed on preventing rather than curing disease.

Improvements also continue to be made in the area of transportation and handling. Some of these improvements result in economic returns that offset the cost of the changes, but the public must also know that a balance must sometimes be struck between the welfare of the animal and cost of production.

The most appropriate response to misinformation is education. Those on the forefront of animal agriculture have identified three general approaches to the challenges of public ignorance and animal rights agendas: (1) the animal agriculture industry must have a well-organized response; (2) guidelines must be established for the care and use of animals in agriculture; and (3) educational materials and programs must be made available to the public.

It is clear that producers and researchers must continue to work together to develop a base of information from which current production practices can be evaluated and, where warranted, realistic changes made. Perceived ethics of producing and marketing animal-derived products are extremely important in the acceptance of these products by consumers. In addition, public perception often forms the basis for legislation and regulation of agriculture production and marketing.

Well-intentioned but unrealistic, unnecessary, and nonconstructive restrictions based on misinformation have been adopted into law in European countries and have had a negative effect on production efficiency and trade economy. A timely educational effort now may prevent the passing of inappropriate legislation in the U.S.

In an effort to educate producers and the public alike, the American Veterinary Medical Association

LOWELLVILLE, Ohio—A record number of competitors came from Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia to participate in Yeo Farms fourth Livestock Judging Contest held in conjunction with Yeo Farms Annual Club Lamb Sale on April

has published a set of animal welfare recommendations. For example, it has taken the position that confinement provides many opportunities to enhance the health and welfare of food animals. Organizations such as the Livestock Conservation Institute, producer and breed associations, universities, and national committees have developed informational materials on appropriate animal care, handling and transportation practices.

Many livestock and marketing groups have developed operational codes of ethics. Colleges are offering new courses on animal welfare and, in other animal-related courses, are devoting more time to animal welfare and its relationship to research and production on animal welfare. Research continues to provide information on how animals perceive their environments and to investigate what constitutes well-being for different species.

The issues of animal welfare, care, and use will not disappear. The goal of animal agriculture must be to bring the issues to the forefront where they can be clearly seen and discussed, and if need be, changes made. In this way, uninformed and misinformed Americans will gain greater understanding and appreciation for the importance of animal agriculture in our world.

# Scores Close As Record Number Compete

22. Both events took place at the farm in Lowellville.

Sixty-five young people competed as individuals and as members of county 4-H club teams in a tightly contested event. There were 10 junior teams, for those up to the age of 13, and six senior teams.

Each participant was asked to evaluate seven pens containing four animals. There were four pens of cattle and three of sheep. Each contestant was also asked to estimate the weight of a young Angus bull so that, in the event of a tie score in the judging competition, the contestant whose estimate of the bull's weight was the closer would be given the higher placing. As it turned out, several positions in the contest were settled by the tie-breaking estimate of the bull's weight.

Charles County, Maryland swept first place in the team competition in both divisions. On the junior team were Jonathan House, Becky Rice-Overstreet, Katie Roberts, and Angelique White. On the senior team were Beth Braun, Jason Roberts, Sarah Roberts, and Joe Swann.

Edging out the others to win second place in the junior division was the Little Woolies team from Lawrence County, Pennsylvania. The team consisted of Chris Benninghoff of Bessemer, Shawna Kephart of Enon Valley, and Bar-

bie and Jesse Mahosky of Wampum. Second place in the senior division was won by the Mahoning County Livestock Judging Club, Ohio. Participating in this second place team were Melissa Glista of Canfield, Andrea Musser of New Middletown, Matt Petrus of New Springfield, and Richard Ricketts also of New Springfield.

Another team from Charles County, Maryland took the third place honors in the junior division. The team consists of Kim Feaganes, Beth Ann House, Carrie Moore, and Beth Robert. The third place senior team was from Jefferson County, Ohio with Jeremy Fabian, David Hendrix, Ric Hendrix, and Mike McKim.

In the individual competition, Jonathan House of Charles County, Maryland won the blue ribbon in the junior division. Second and third places in that division were both won by contestants from Lawrence County, Jesse Mahosky took the second place by only one point and Shawna Kephart won third on the basis of the tie breaker to leave Alie Matie of Mahoning County in fourth.

In the senior division, Andrea Musser of Mahoning County won the blue ribbon. Second place was won by Beth Braun of Charles County, Maryland. Third place went to Ric Hendrix of Jefferson County, Ohio.

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