

The Veterinarian—The Original Animal Welfarist

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A veterinarian by nature of his training and his professional endeavors is involved in animal welfare. The mere fact that you all took the *Veterinarian's Oath* is proof and evidence of the interest in animal welfare by each and every veterinarian regardless of his professional pursuit.

“Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of livestock resources, the promotion of public health and the advancement of medical knowledge.

“I will practice my profession conscientiously with dignity and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics.

“I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.”

(Adopted by AVMA House of Delegates, July 1969)

Animal welfare is not new—because this is the reason why the profession of veterinary medicine was created. Further, the first animal welfare act was enacted in 1641 in Massachusetts and during the 1800's other states adopted legislative acts to encompass animal welfare activities. During the first four decades of the 1900's, animal rescue leagues and animal shelters developed without specific welfare acts appearing. Specific acts followed and are cited as examples:

1955 Humane Slaughter Acts

1966 Laboratory Animal Welfare (puppy snatching bill)

1976 Horse Soring Act

These acts and others followed. European countries have been involved with animal welfare acts of different dimensions for the last 10 years. These acts deal largely with confinement of animals and the performance of surgery (castration) without anesthesia. In some European countries, confinement of certain species of animals is unlawful. Other countries have similar movements underway at the present time. In the 1970's, two books, *Animal Machines* by Ruth Harrison and *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer, created great interest in animal welfare and animal rights. The interest has been generated to all facets of the livestock industry, to youth groups and within the classrooms. Television programs portraying the negative

aspects of animal welfare to the general public have been shown. Educational programs have been introduced into schools promoting no meat diets and anti-confinement systems of raising animals.

The motivators of these movements are many and varied in origin and in purpose. It must be remembered that less than 4 to 6 percent of the USA's population is involved in animal production. This means the greater mass of our population know nothing about animal production and are extremely gullible to rhetoric used by the welfare movements. Many welfarists are vegetarians; some are attorneys and others are dedicated animals lovers, so it is difficult to throw them all into one classification.

It must be remembered that our youths must have a “cause” and many movements are made by these young people towards animal welfare and animal rights. Many are on our college campuses, and some are enrolled in Animal Science and Veterinary Medicine.

Animal welfarists in general will not accept productivity as a criteria of welfare in domestic animals. They feel that animals should not be confined, stalled, tethered or raised as individuals. In the United States, particularly in Iowa, animal producers have adopted technology to the point that animals and birds raised as meat, milk and eggs are raised with the utmost of productivity to the point that humans in the USA have the cheapest animal protein of high quality, and most readily available of any place in the world.

The *Animal Rights* groups advocate moral rights of animals—the right to commingle with others of their species, to move with freedom, to have the same rights as humans. Already there is an organization of *Attorneys for Animal Rights*, a group of lawyers that are attempting to give animals rights to bring legal actions. In one state at the present time a dog is suing its owner and the veterinarian because it was spayed. **Animal Rights is for the individual veterinarian to ponder and evaluate. Animal welfare should be considered by all veterinarians.**

The movement is here—it is all around us. Do we denounce it? Do we jest about it? Or do we attempt to do our utmost to see that animals don't suffer and have a condition of health and well-being? Our livestock producer friends are looking to our profession for leadership in combating the irrational movement and irresponsible actions and possibly unenforceable legislation. There is the firm belief that veterinarians can exhibit leadership by exhibiting the

positive; that is, looking at ourselves, our actions and attempting to carry the story that we are stewards of animals and we do have a responsibility. We are the original animal welfarists.

The many, many efforts that can be made by an individual veterinarian are cited as examples:

- ✓ Denounce beating and abuse of animals at anytime by anyone! Speak up when you see it!
- ✓ Discourage castration of adult animals (without anesthesia). *Example*—Calves castrated under a month of age is recommended.
- ✓ Encourage dehorning the first month of life—discourage dehorning of calves over 4 months of age without anesthesia.
- ✓ Encourage herd health programs. The greatest suffering occurs in animals deprived of proper environmental protection and disease control programs. A pig with rhinitis, worms and dysentery in a confinement unit filled with gases is not only unhappy, but is suffering.
- ✓ Confinement of animals is not a violation of the animal's welfare. In most cases it is to the animal's advantage when compared to the conventional system of animal production.
- ✓ Encourage livestock producers to build proper animal handling and restraint facilities. Be able to secure and show them the correct plans.
- ✓ Report animals that are suffering to local humane officers. Don't be afraid of getting involved.
- ✓ Encourage cities and towns to develop a model dog ordinance, to develop a dog pound and to humanely handle captive dogs and cats.
- ✓ Participate in lectures on animal care to school groups,

4-H clubs, scouts and other interested groups.

There are also efforts that can be made by veterinarians as a group:

- ✓ Historically, veterinary medicine has held organizations dealing with animal welfare at a distance. Assist local humane groups with their endeavors. Learn to communicate with them and collectively assist them with their problems. This is the best approach to teach animal welfare and to ward off improper treatment and disposal of animals by lay personnel. Humane and welfare groups are making inroads in some areas into the practice of veterinary medicine.
- ✓ Develop educational programs for the county or city on items pertaining to animal welfare. Radio, television and newspapers are all media that can be used to get the story across to the public.
- ✓ Children that learn the needs of animals by owning one soon learn citizenship and have a greater appreciation for the needs of their fellowman. Assistance in 4-H Veterinary Science programs and Scout animal projects are steps towards animal welfare and good citizenship.

Animal welfare is our responsibility. Let's demonstrate this charge by leading out to show the public that we love animals, that we want to care for them and that we will make this attempt without necessitating monetary return. In this way and in many other undescribed ways, veterinarians can take charge of animal welfare and not allow the uninformed to assume leadership. The mere fact that you are a veterinarian makes you an animal welfarist. With your training and knowledge, you are the logical resource person on items pertaining to the welfare of animals.

