



The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare

An all-party group for members of both houses at Westminster formed to promote and further the cause of animal welfare by all means available to the Parliaments at Westminster and in Europe

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 18th October 2011 FARM ANIMALS: Cloning & Food Labelling

Attendees: Sarah Hormozi (PFMA), Lorraine Platt (Conservatives Against Foxhunting), Joshua Kaile (League Against Cruel Sports), John Ball (Search & Rescue Dogs), Chris Draper (Born Free Foundation), Anthony Roberts (Royal Veterinary College), Peter Jinman (RCVS), Claire Robinson (RSPCA), Stacey Frier (RSPCA), Sheila Crispin (Dog Advisory Council), Peter Collins (Animals Count), Vanessa Hudson (Animals Count), Jon Homan (Animals Count), Andrew Knight (Animals Count), Sean Kensley (BVA AWF/BVA), Sylvia Tabor (DTA), Gail Williams (ASS §VAP), Tracey Genever (The Blue Cross), Catharine Peerless (RSPCA), Sarah Winder (RSPCA), Christina Dixon (Network for Animals), J.V. Davies (RCVS), Mark Jones (Humane Society International), Tom Quinn (IFAW), F. Costain (CIWF), Peter Stevenson (CIWF), David Bowles (RSPCA) Gwyn Smith (NFU)

Roger Williams MP, Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Lord Soulsby, Neil Parish MP, Lord Hodgson

Apologies:

Duke of Montrose, Baroness Byford, Angela Smith MP, Mike Hancock, Sir Peter Bottomley MP, Mark Pritchard MP, Andrew Rosindell MP, Cathy Jamieson MP, Baroness Fookes, Baroness Masham. Lorraine Fulbrook MP, Caroline Dineage MP, Caroline Lucas MP, Jill Moss (Bella Moss), Rob Jervis-Gibbons (Battersea Dogs & Cats Home), Peter (Petsitters Alliance), Janet Nunn (Pet Care Trust), Lady Fretwell (Passports for Pets), Maureen Purvis (Greyhounds UK), David Cavill (Animal Care College), Andrew Trawford (Donkey Sanctuary), Lady Masham

AGM

Neil Parish MP to remain as chairman

Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Caroline Lucas, Mike Hancock MP all to remain as vice-chairmen

Andrew Rosindell MP to remain as treasurer

Lord Soulsby to remain as Secretary

Financial report noted

FOOD LABELLING

David Bowles – RSPCA

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At the end of this month, it will have been 2 years since the EU Commission produced a report on labelling with a recommendation on animal welfare labelling. Unfortunately, that recommendation seems to have sunk in Brussels but the need for it still remains.

If we look at polling results, the public seems to be confused about labelling. Earlier this month, The Institute of Grocery Distribution found that nearly 50% of the public want to buy high welfare products. European polls have shown similar statistics. Two other European polls revealed that 85/90% wanted better labelling as they were confused with the current situation. There is desire out there for better labelling and if we look at one particular labelling scheme, being that of egg labelling agreed in 2001 and in effect from 2004, we can see the positive benefits it brings. Before it came into effect using terms like country fresh or farm fresh confused the buyers and they needed clearer choices. Consequently, after many years the Commission brought in the mandatory labelling scheme and it went onto be a success. Year on year there has been a 2/3% rise in the free-range egg buying pattern and in 2004 when it began there was a 4% rise. There is a correlation between mandatory schemes and information and education assisting the public in being clearer.

The RSPCA would like to see mandatory labelling as we believe voluntary has little effect. The question is what standards should that be based on? We believe the standards could be a mixture of farming systems such as the egg scheme or a mixture of outward indicators. What is crucial is that the scheme is transparent and standards are audited properly and that they should not just apply to fresh but also anything containing animal products.

The Commission are looking at three things. Last month the proposed country of origin was agreed and this will come into effect in due course. This mean it will be mandatory and that there is to be clear wording on fresh meat and they will look at products too. However, this will only state country of origin which we don't believe is related to a code of animal welfare. The second thing to be proposed early next year is to allow animal welfare labelling under the Quality Scheme. This will apply to fresh produce only but it will be a step forward.

The reality is that in the last two years the Commission seem to have moved away from discussions about an animal welfare label replacing it with other proposals but the RSPCA believe it remains necessary. The current proposals will still leave consumers confused and going back to the eggs issue it seems that consumers are still demanding something the EU have not given us.

In the past politicians have tended to be scared to ask for stronger legislation on labelling because of trade issues. However, last week for the first time an indication was given from the World Trade Organisation about what it's position is on mandatory food labelling with regards to Tuna Dolphin labelling. It was agreed that it was permissible under the WTO rules to have a mandatory scheme, that a country can chose its own standards and can use labelling to give information on animal welfare in this instance The WTO is now not just agreeing schemes for endangered animals meaning they have widened the agenda.

Gwyn Jones – National Farmers Union

As farmers we live in a different world and are aware that consumers are feeling the effects of job insecurity and effects of recession. We live in a world where markets don't always work as they should, a world where regulation doesn't always work as it should. The welfare of laying hens is an example as illegal egg products will continue to come into the UK bringing serious pressure on UK farmer's margins.

This is a world of rising costs on farmers and retailers have again launched a price war on food. These retailers are now demanding substantial cuts from suppliers. Additionally, the consumer tells us one thing but then tells us something different when shopping. This is a world where we as farmers are expected to invest in the future, to reduce carbon production and improve welfare whilst playing our part in the challenge of feeding the world. We are up for that challenge but we need to have markets that work and are not disadvantaged when competing with European farmers. We have just recently caught a major retailer selling Hertfordshire beef but importing it from Uruguay. We have not got country of origin sorted yet let alone anything else.

Is welfare labelling for animals about those reared in systems that others approve of? Good welfare is the result of good management and stockmanship, not the popular systems which are often bandied around. The Red Tractor mark tells us and consumers that food which carries the mark is British, has proper traceability and is from improving standards farms. We are happy with the RSPCA Freedom Food system and we like the choice and assurance it gives to consumers. We should concentrate on what we have and not invest in systems and schemes which are not going to be helpful. Consumers are confused already and I question whether they are able and willing to pay extra money for their food.

Neil Parish MP - In Europe there are the enriched cages which will be through the EU Union by 2012 but there will be upwards of a 100 million hens still producing eggs to lower standards which will float around Europe and liquid egg and powdered egg may get through to our markets. Giving consumers choice on exactly what they are buying so farmers can produce to a standard and can be recompensed for meeting that standard is important. The WTO starting to recognise standards is interesting as for years there has been an issue over that. I don't think British farmers have anything to fear, as a farmer I know high welfare standards are what we work to and we need the public to know what those standards are so they can drive the market.

Peter Stevenson (CIWF) - From CIWF's point of view the key thing regarding mandatory labelling is that it means the low welfare has to be labelled, not just high welfare so consumers are given the opportunity to make the choice. The intensely farmed should be labelled too. I suspect the point the NFU might make is that it is management not systems that count, but some systems like sow stalls and battery hens have no potential for good welfare – even the best stockperson in the world cannot make them work for high welfare.

Gwyn Jones (NFU) – To have a welfare ruling here and exporting a huge chunk of what we produce means the improvements will need to be throughout Europe. With eggs it has worked well as the retailers got behind it and they make the real decisions. Only eggs in shells are covered though– many eggs are sold as egg products and those are ones which often come from some of the illegal systems. It is almost impossible to trace that egg product so it is fanciful to think that you can label things that accurately. I do know the damage caused by exporting huge chunks of our own industry to countries where things are not done to the same standard.

Neil Parish MP – APGAW will write to the Minister about the illegally produced eggs in Europe in liquid and powder egg form. One problem in Europe is that large farms have been converting some cages to enriched but not all. How do you differentiate those eggs from the correctly produced ones? I know that is something the Minister is very concerned about already. I am pleased to hear about the WTO moves as this issue has always been used as an argument against better labelling and I think we should consider how to get the animal welfare labelling considered by the EU again.

Cloning

Peter Stevenson – Compassion in World Farming

This has become a very big issue in the EU Parliament. The aim of cloning is to produce genetically identical copies of animals. Cells are collected from the donor animal and they are then cultured. An egg cell is taken from another animal and enucleated, i.e. the nucleus is removed. The donor cell is then transferred into the enucleated egg cell and they are fused by an electrical pulse and from there develops a cloned embryo. That is implanted into a surrogate dam who carries it to birth.

Cloning has been found to cause a great deal of animal suffering. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) looked at the problems caused for the surrogate dams finding there was an increased frequency of abnormal, difficult and painful births, especially in cattle. Part of the problem comes from cattle clones being much larger than a normal foetus. For the clone itself, the majority die during pregnancy and of those that survive a significant proportion die in early days and weeks of life for example from respiratory and immune system problems.

The European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies stated that given the current level of suffering they had doubts about whether cloning for food supply was ethically justified. What scientists will say is that these are past problems but the evidence points in the other direction and a new update by EFSA in 2010 found there is no new information to make them change their conclusions.

Even if the high levels of mortality are reduced, we need to consider how clones and their offspring will be used in the livestock sector. The likelihood is that cloning will be used to produce multiple copies of the highest yielding cows and the fastest growing pigs. Yet traditional selective breeding has already led to major health problems for such animals. EFSA has concluded that the biggest threat facing dairy cows is genetic selection for high milk yield which causes higher levels of lameness, mastitis etc. Similarly the selection of pigs for fast growth rates is leading to widespread problems including cardiovascular issues and leg problems. Cloning will operate at the extreme end of this and will ultimately lead to more animals suffering. There is also another question which is the loss of genetic diversity as a herd of clones will be genetically the same which makes them vulnerable to disease challenge.

Where should we be going? The cloned animals are not going to be used to provide meat and milk as they are breeding animals. The meat and milk comes from their offspring and they will be the products of a clone and a non-clone. Given the range of health and welfare problems there doesn't seem to be a legitimate part for cloning to play in UK farming. The EU needs to ban the carrying out of cloning and also the use of clones and their offspring in EU farms. In effect this would make it pointless to import clones and their offspring, semen and embryos as they would be un-useable. The sale of meat and milk from clones and their offspring should be prohibited as agreed by the EU parliament which voted by massive majority, not on food safety grounds but on animal welfare and ethical grounds. The Commission and the Council are willing to ban sale of food from clones but not from their descendants. The proposed Novel Food Regulation collapsed because of this disagreement and the UK government led opposition to any restriction on cloning. The Commission now plans to come forward with new proposals. Cloning might not be genetic engineering but it is opening the door for it.

Gwyn Smith – National Farmers Union

I think the important thing is the challenge I outlined earlier which is meeting growing demand and cost. Do we want to shut the door on science and handicap our ability to meet those challenges? Are we

against science per se? What if a real breakthrough occurs? What happens if there is a benefit for poor people in developing countries? It is more than likely that the answers to producing more food from less land and looking after the environment will be found in science. We know cloning has problems and the sale is banned in Europe but this is science in its infancy. Scientists have found a way to make stem cells in humans only recently. If all scientific work had been halted in its infancy a lot of progress would not have been achieved. There have always been concerns which are right and proper but I am a dairy farmer and I know that in the 1950 there was opposition to the artificial insemination of dairy cows and yet today we would struggle to farm without it.

Cloning does have welfare problems that may be overcome and if there are no welfare concerns and if there is a real advantage would we still be against it in principle? I would urge you not to stifle new technology. Various committees take a lot of time to make sure everyone is safeguarded and we have leading scientists in the country and it is important they stay here. It is vitally important that science is allowed to flourish even if we don't like some aspects of the technology. If we are talking about banning offspring it gets silly as there is no difference in the offspring of clones to any other animals. It has become clear that it is impossible for retailers to guarantee that products they sell have nothing from animals which may have cloning in at some point in the line.

Farmers need all the help we can get and it should not be forgotten that consumer's attitudes change quickly and often.

Neil Parish MP – A Holstein Friesian is already tightly bred already and to start cloning from those small pools worries me from a disease point of view as well as animal welfare.

Gwyn Jones (NFU) - As a dairy farmer I wouldn't clone my highest yielding cow, I would clone the ones I don't notice and which haven't had any lameness or health problems so my herd would be healthier and much less prone to problems. I am not suggesting I would do that but we would not necessarily be cloning the extremes of breeds. Breeders did go too far in breeding for high yields as it is easy to breed and you get results quickly. That direction was taken on for too long. Today we have a range of Holstein cow, one for every farming system and if you apply the right Holstein to the right system there is a cow to fit all these systems.

Roger Williams MP – I am not aware of any commercial or practical intent to use cloning in commercial farming. It is done on a research basis owing to high expense of cloning making it unaffordable. If cloning ever did come into more general use and was cheap surely it won't be used to clone unhealthy animals, it would be for healthy animals.

Peter Stevenson (CIWF) – Those like Gwyn might be willing to clone from healthy middle range but most studies indicate that cloning is carried out at the high yielding, fast growing end of things. It is still early days but in the US and Brazil it is well developed, indeed it is very prevalent in the US. This is the time we in the EU can do something about it. To me this is not just about cloning, it is about what kind of agriculture we want in the UK and EU. Are we ever more going to industrialise it? Or are we going to move to agriculture that is more sustainable and respects animals as sentient beings?

Andrew Knight (Animals Count) – I am a vet with a PhD and have a strong scientific background. Gwyn seems to be asserting the point that to stop cloning would be anti-science but most of us scientists would not want to continue with a science that causes so many problems. Most scientists would feel that only ethical science should proceed. There is a whole range of alternative science which can be used to increase the productivity of farm animals, there are other ways.

Peter Jinman (RCVS) I was on the EFRA working group and you are quite right when you make comment about the US and Brazil but also consider China and Japan and so on. When we were doing a world search in order to write the report we found a large amount of work that has been done. We were very cautious on what we said as we have poor basis on which to base lots of statistics but what was clear was the amount of work in other countries was growing. Even if we decide to change our way, it is happening in a lot of other areas.

Gwyn Jones (NFU) – Are you of the view that the problems are never going to be overcome? Are you suggesting this is how it is going to be and there will be no breakthroughs? People can oppose on principle but most scientist don't draw a point as they are not clear whether it will be different in a year or two as they advance. The offspring are already out there and I as a dairy farmer have no way of identifying descendants of clones if I am buying semen for example. If it is going to increase over the rest of the world and the problems are overcome are we going to say we won't have anything to with the offspring of clones when it will disadvantage us?

Peter Stevenson (CIWF)– Even if eventually the problems are solved there does remain the question of the health and welfare problems likely to be experienced on farm by high yielding or fast growing offspring of clones and what kind of future we want. These kinds of animals are an immensely inefficient way of feeding a growing population. The soy and grains used to feed these animals are just one issue and this is not an argument for vegetarianism but one for considering how we feed our animals in general. It is counter-productive to produce even more animals highly dependent on rich cereal diet. CIWF believe that cloning is detrimental to animal welfare - and we don't need it to feed the world

Neil Parish MP–APGAW will write to Jim Paice MP as we need guidelines on how this is to dealt with and how good practice could work. Clones could be produced to create better animals but we can't necessary rely on industry to make that decision as they will choose the most yielding cow and the fastest growing pig. We need to work out how this can be managed if it does progress in the future.

END OF MEETING