

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

8 November 2011

Dear Committee

Senate Inquiry: Higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this Senate Inquiry. We acknowledge that young people with a future in agriculture are in short supply and this Inquiry is an opportunity to contribute to the improvement of agricultural education and skills training. Our submission refers to the specific item in the terms of reference relating to “the incorporation of animal welfare principles in agriculture education”.

RSPCA Australia supports and encourages animal welfare education at all stages of formal education, in order to improve understanding of the principles of animal welfare, foster a positive attitude towards animals and help prevent acts of cruelty (RSPCA policy D4 ‘Animals in education’).

The subject of animal welfare in agricultural education can engage students in current and, sometimes, controversial issues, while providing opportunities to reflect upon the animal welfare implications of different practices within the livestock industries. A solid foundation from which to discuss these issues remain the Five Freedoms, which take into account the fact that animals are sentient beings and are therefore capable of feeling pain, hunger and fear:

1. *Freedom from hunger and thirst*
By ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
2. *Freedom from discomfort*
By providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. *Freedom from pain, injury or disease*
Prevention by rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. *Freedom to express normal behaviour*
By providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
5. *Freedom from fear and distress*
By ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

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In order to foster engagement, a necessary part of agricultural education should be the scientific analysis of animal welfare aspects that relate to livestock production systems. The evaluation of contemporary animal welfare concepts, animal care principles and basic legal requirements/responsibilities relating to care and ownership of animals is part of this.

Agricultural education and training should also emphasise an appreciation of factors that influence animal welfare, for example, understanding animal behaviour, the role of good stockmanship in improving animal welfare during handling and the ethical implications of animal production.

Wherever surgical procedures are carried out as part of a skills training or education course, those responsible for providing the training must be competent and, wherever possible, accredited in the relevant procedure. It is of the utmost importance that students are aware that (accredited) training and competency strongly influence animal welfare when carrying out surgical procedures. Indeed, the level of operator competency will affect all aspects of livestock production from surgical husbandry procedures through to livestock management from the moment an animal is born to the time it is slaughtered.

If, throughout the course of their education or training, a student expresses concern about the welfare of an animal or animals in the program, then a proper process needs to be in place to ensure that concerns are addressed in a timely manner and followed up as necessary. At no time, should animals be neglected or subjected to pain or distress as a result of their use for education/training purposes. The use of animals for training/education purposes should be minimised and a strong focus placed on the principles of reduction, refinement and replacement. Where students wish to opt-out of specific practices because of their animal welfare implication, provision should be made to accommodate this, where it is possible to achieve the necessary educational outcomes in other ways.

RSPCA Australia trusts that the Committee acknowledges the importance of including animal welfare in agricultural education and skills training. Wherever such programs or curricula are developed, the RSPCA should be part of the consultation process to ensure the material is fair, balanced and accurately reflects the available animal welfare science and the full range of production systems available.

Please don't hesitate to contact us should you require further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

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As part of this Inquiry, the Committee may also be interested in the following:

- In 2008, the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) Education and Training working group undertook a stocktake of education and training in animal welfare. This stocktake is available here: http://www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/aaws/stocktake/stocktake_of_animal_welfare_education_and_training.
- In the same year, the AAWS Education and Training working group followed this stocktake up with a benchmarking study to assess Australia's performance at an international level. This study is available here: http://www.daff.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/832407/intnl-benchmark-education-training-08.pdf.
- The UK Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) Advanced Training Partnerships provides "postgraduate level professional development in the area of agriculture and food production". Further information is available here: <http://bbsrc.ac.uk/news/people-skills-training/2011/110523-pr-advanced-food-security-skills.aspx>.