

Monday 7 April 2014

## **Animal welfare policy needs more science and less emotion**

'Animal welfare policy is certainly one of the most complex issues the agricultural sector and the community have to grapple with, and it is important to approach it carefully and objectively, without knee-jerk decisions driven by emotive images or anthropomorphism', according to Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Australian Farm Institute.

This is a key message arising from a series of papers on farm animal welfare included in the latest edition of the Australian Farm Institute's *Farm Policy Journal* released today.

'Animal welfare is complex because the concept is interpreted in vastly different ways depending on the country you live in, the industry you work for, your personal experience with animals and to some extent your personal beliefs and values.

'For example an animal welfare activist, focusing entirely on the presumed welfare of a sow, might be horrified at the thought of the sow being confined in a small area in the first few weeks after giving birth to piglets. But to a farmer, focusing on the collective welfare of the sow and her piglets, briefly confining the sow dramatically reduces the number of piglets that get killed by the sow, and therefore results in a net animal welfare gain.

'The high degree of subjectivity associated with animal welfare reinforces the need for an objective and pragmatic approach, which is science-based and which recognises the realities of productive livestock farming.

'Scientists and animal experts have been working hard to better understand how to assess and improve the welfare of farm animals. It includes veterinarians, animal behaviourists, and animal physiologists. Their findings over the last 50 years have already contributed to significant changes in the way livestock are farmed. In fact many of the success stories, where farm animals ultimately experience improved welfare, arise from situations where farmers, scientists and NGOs all work together to achieve changes.

'This simple fact often seems to get lost in much of the debate surrounding this issue. Ultimately, it is not the headline-grabbing activists that bring about improvements in farm animal welfare, but the many thousands of livestock farmers and extension officers who work with their animals on a daily basis and make the critical decisions that ensure their well-being and productivity is enhanced' indicated Mick Keogh.

The Autumn 2014 edition of the *Farm Policy Journal*, titled 'Farmers fare well with better animal welfare' includes the following contributions:

- *Do natural settings safeguard the welfare of domesticated animals?* by Paul Hemsworth, Grahame Coleman and Jeremy Skuse, from the Animal Welfare Science Centre at the University of Melbourne

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# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Animal welfare policy needs more science and less emotion (continued)**

- *Making slaughterhouses, more humane for cattle, pigs, and sheep*, by Temple Grandin, from the Department of Animal Science at Colorado State University
- *The costs and benefits of animal welfare: how the United Kingdom pork industry adapted to changes in animal welfare*, by Mick Sloyan, Director of BPEX (represents pig levy payers in England)
- *The future of animal welfare policy and its implications for Australian livestock industries*, by Jed Goodfellow, Melina Tensen and Lynne Bradshaw from the RSPCA
- Interview with Gardner Murray, Special Adviser to the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) and former Australian Chief Veterinary Officer
- Interview with Dougal Gordon, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Lot Feeders' Association

The Autumn 2014 quarter *Farm Policy Journal* is available online at the Australian Farm Institute website [www.farminstitute.org.au](http://www.farminstitute.org.au) or by phoning (02) 9690 1388.

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