

MEDIA RELEASE

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Animal welfare – a multi-faceted challenge for agriculture

Australian livestock industries will need to adopt a multi-faceted response to successfully address wealthy consumers' growing awareness of animal welfare issues.

This is the key conclusion arising from a series of papers on animal welfare contained in the latest edition of the *Farm Policy Journal*, released today by the Australian Farm Institute.

'The papers address the issue of animal welfare from a number of different perspectives, highlighting that consumer awareness of animal welfare issues is likely to increase, rather than diminish in the future. This is particularly the case in relation to Australian livestock industries, which are more and more reliant on wealthy consumers.'

'Animal welfare labelling (currently being considered by the European Union) and the need to implement credible and well-targeted public information strategies are the two main animal welfare challenges facing Australian livestock industries,' explained **Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Institute**.

'Australian livestock industries would probably not favour a move to mandatory animal welfare standards and the introduction of an associated labelling system, although it may be that the only alternative to increasingly restrictive animal welfare regulations is at least a voluntary accreditation and labelling system.'

'It is also possible that animal welfare issues will become a part of future trade arrangements, meaning that trade access into some markets will be dependent on animal welfare accreditation.'

Similar trends are emerging for issues such as farm environmental sustainability and greenhouse emission performance, and this particularly applies in wealthier consumer markets. These are markets in which premiums exist for quality, but which also have more stringent, consumer-driven market access requirements.

The papers also highlight that a robust public information campaign is an absolutely essential component of a response by livestock industries to consumer and activist concerns about animal welfare.

'As urban consumers become more and more remote from the realities of everyday farm operations, livestock industries need to develop and implement public information strategies that inform and educate consumers about the animal welfare practices and standards that have been adopted by livestock industries.'

'As has been evident in recent debates about chicken cage sizes and sheep mulesing, it is very difficult for livestock industries to adequately respond when these issues suddenly emerge in public debate. A preferred approach is a sustained public information campaign resulting in better informed consumers.'

'Australian livestock industries probably have not done enough to date to explain to consumers the reasons for different animal husbandry practices and efforts that have been made to improve Australian animal welfare standards.'

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