



AWC Opinion on the Animal Welfare Issues related to Covid-19

**Animal Welfare Committee,
Area 2D, Nobel
House,
17 Smith Square,
London, SW1P 3JR.**

Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) Opinions

AWC Opinions are short reports to government¹ on contemporary topics relating to animal welfare. They are based on evidence and consultation with interested parties. They highlight particular concerns and indicate issues for further consideration by governments and others.

AWC is an expert committee of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in England and the governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. More information about the Committee is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/animal-welfare-committee-awc>

Opinions published by the Farm Animal Welfare Committee

Welfare of cattle kept for beef production, 2019

Welfare of animals killed on-farm, 2018

Sustainable agriculture and farm animal welfare, 2017

Links between the health and wellbeing of farmers and farm animal welfare, 2017

Free farrowing systems, 2015

Calf nutrition, 2015

CCTV in slaughterhouses, 2015

Welfare of Farmed Fish at the Time of Killing, 2014

Welfare of Farmed Fish, 2014

Welfare of Farmed and Park Deer, 2013

Welfare Implications of Breeding and Breeding Technologies in Commercial Livestock Agriculture, 2012

Contingency Planning for Farm Animal Welfare in Disasters and Emergencies, 2012

¹ Where we refer to “government” we are addressing the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in England, the Scottish and Welsh Governments, the Northern Ireland Assembly and other responsible government Departments and Agencies.

Contents

AWC STRATEGIC REVIEW OF ANIMAL WELFARE ISSUES RELATED TO COVID-19	4
Introduction	4
AWC's philosophy of approach	4
Business.....	7
'Just in time production' or 'short cycle production'	8
Specific issues.....	9
Personnel.....	10
Behaviour	11
Nutrition	12
Breeding	13
Transport.....	13
Slaughter	13
Health	14
Charities, Rescue Centres and Educational Farms	16
Veterinary profession.....	17
Supplies	18
Conclusions and Recommendations	18

AWC STRATEGIC REVIEW OF ANIMAL WELFARE ISSUES RELATED TO COVID-19

Introduction

1. The Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) is an expert committee of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Scottish and Welsh Governments. AWC advises the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales on the welfare of animals. This includes farmed, companion and wild animals kept by people.

AWC's philosophy of approach

2. In 1965, the Brambell Committee, led by Professor Roger Brambell began the development of the 'Five Freedoms'. These Five Freedoms were designed to avoid unnecessary suffering and to promote good welfare for farm animals. The Five Freedoms remain an important tool, even after 54 years, as they still allow UK governments to make improvements to existing legislation to ensure the welfare of animals remains to the highest standards. The Five Freedoms are as follows:
 - a. Freedom from hunger and thirst, by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
 - b. Freedom from discomfort, by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
 - c. Freedom from pain, injury and disease, by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
 - d. Freedom to express normal behaviour, by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
 - e. Freedom from fear and distress, by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.
3. The Five Freedoms have been the cornerstone of government and industry policy and are enshrined in the Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock. In addition to the Five Freedoms, The Animal Welfare Act 2006 also ensures that the welfare needs of animals are met and that the owner or keeper are responsible. The five welfare needs are:
 - a. Need a suitable environment (place to live).

- b. Need a suitable diet.
 - c. Need to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.
 - d. Need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals (if applicable).
 - e. Need to be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease.
4. All animals are recognised as sentient beings within the EU Treaty of Amsterdam 1999. In addition, the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (England and Wales) and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2006 (Scotland) include a duty of care to provide for the needs of protected animals for which humans have permanent or temporary responsibility.
 5. AWC believe that its obligations include identifying and ensuring that certain serious harms never occur to any animal, and where possible to minimise any harm which might occur and endeavour to balance any harms to the animals affected against the benefits to humans and/or other animals. At a minimum, each individual animal should have a life that is worth living, and a growing proportion should have a good life.
 6. There have been many attempts to define animal welfare. In AWC's view, welfare encompasses both physical and mental health, and for all animals good welfare is largely determined on a daily basis by the skills of the stock people, owners, the system of husbandry, and the suitability of the animal genotype for the environment. From time to time, external factors can have an impact on welfare, for example; infectious disease epidemics, adverse weather conditions, global economics and geo-political influences. These circumstances often affect animal welfare in the short term and contingencies are necessary to minimise the severity and duration of poorer welfare.
 7. Some pain and distress are unavoidable in all animal sectors even with current knowledge, husbandry and farming practises, but the goal should be to minimise their occurrence. Difficult ethical and practical decisions have to be made when dealing with suffering, sometimes by imposing a lesser act that may still cause short-term pain or distress but provide long-term relief for the individual or group. The long-term goal should be to eliminate the source of the problem through improved disease control, husbandry and breeding to avoid this lesser act.

8. When assessing any welfare problem, it is necessary to consider the extent of poor welfare, the intensity and duration of suffering, the number of animals involved, the alternatives available and the opportunities to promote wellbeing. Equally important is the ability to improve welfare immediately through existing sound husbandry and good stockmanship. Some day-to-day welfare challenges are seen across a range of species and farming systems, although some may be intrinsic to certain specific production systems.
9. To offer appropriate advice about the welfare of all animals, AWC takes account of knowledge and the practical experience from scientists, veterinarians, farmers, non-government organisations, charities and representatives. A broad-ranging approach is used in AWC's advice, drawing on relevant views and attempting to take account of human interests with a concern to ensure that the animal's interests remain to the fore. When the knowledge base is poor, or when the application of evidence is inconclusive, the animal should be given the benefit of the doubt.
10. AWC is made up of independent experts who rely on the latest scientific evidence from peer review publications, stakeholder engagements, industry input, related work within the field of animal welfare and speaking with experts within the area. AWC have advised government by providing reports and opinions.
11. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments have issued substantial social distancing restrictions and have limited the movement of people and the contact they can have with others. Guidance has been produced by governments and many national bodies on the care of companion, livestock and kept wild animals.
12. This opinion is an assessment of the immediate actual and/or possible risks to animal welfare occurring as a result of Covid-19 controls in the early months as it affects the UK farmed animal, companion animal and kept wild animal sectors. The document will discuss the impacts of these risks and the actions that might be taken. This AWC opinion will be added to over the course of the year to include animal welfare issues arising in the medium term through to and potentially beyond the start of 2021.

13. The format of this opinion has been influenced by the need for a quick response. Therefore, there was not time to undertake our usual formal public call for evidence.
14. When compiling this opinion, we called upon the knowledge and expertise of AWC members with their diverse range of backgrounds in order to cover as wide a range of animal welfare issues as possible. In addition, members of AWC have, through personal contacts, obtained the views of many organisations and individuals involved with the keeping of or oversight of the keeping of animals. However, there are limitations to this opinion given the short timespan for contributions and the pace of change across all sectors, as well as the changing nature of general Covid-19 control measures. Greater discussion may be needed on potential mitigations of animal welfare harms and, as more evidence becomes available, it can be used to support such points. Time for further contributions in the second phase of advice may also allow for greater representation from certain sectors that are currently underrepresented.

Business

15. Animals are kept for two main reasons, business or pleasure. Sometimes the two reasons merge as with the keeping of animals for sport.
16. All businesses are being affected by Covid-19 restrictions either directly, through impacts on staff and workplace practices, or indirectly by being prevented from engaging with the public. The loss of sales of foodstuffs to the restaurant, café and canteen trade has markedly affected the livestock supply side and this is producing noticeable stresses on the farming and food processing industries. There are also impacts on companion animal sales and breeding practices, and on racing and show animal events, including county shows.
17. As shown in a previous FAWC opinion on the relationship between animal welfare and human wellbeing² the effects of stress on the owners of animals in the farming sector, especially where financial viability was poor

² FAWC opinion on the health and wellbeing of farmers and farm animal welfare, 2017.

even before Covid-19, have precipitated even greater economic problems. Whilst the reports to date from the agricultural charity sector are only just starting to show a rise in requests for help, this relatively hidden animal welfare risk will be exacerbated by the enforced reduction in the number of people visiting and interacting with livestock keepers. Liaison between those involved with promoting human wellbeing and those involved with animal welfare is of paramount importance to assist both people and their animals and help prevent human and animal suffering. Covid-19 restrictions have also emphasised the importance for human wellbeing of the companionship of animals. Businesses that rely on servicing the needs and health of animals were quickly affected by restriction on personal movement.

Recommendation

Attention needs to be paid to the drop off in interactions between those visiting farms and the importance of this in terms of identifying health and welfare concerns of farmers and of their livestock.

‘Just in time production’ or ‘short cycle production’

18. At the core of animal production is the time it takes to produce and rear to point of sale or slaughter the next generation of the species. Animals with a short gestation period and year-round breeding can produce many offspring for market in a short time. The breeding cycle of broiler poultry from hatched egg to table ready can be as little as 42 days. Incubation takes 21 days. Similarly, some small rodents kept as companion animals, e.g. hamsters with a gestation length of only 20 days and ability to mate within a few days of giving birth, can reproduce rapidly and numbers build up in a short space of time. A lockdown period of just a few weeks therefore matches the reproduction time or production time of some species and with no sales outlet (restaurants for broiler chicken meat or pet shops for hamsters, etc.), either there is risk of severe overcrowding of living areas or emergency culling and cessation of breeding has to be implemented. The production methods of the broiler industry and to a lesser extent the pig

industry are therefore heavily reliant on production matching sales with little spare time available before the next cycle is repeated. The longer the gestation time and rearing to market time the more leeway there is in the system and the less the risk of a welfare problem developing as a consequence of Covid-19 controls.

Recommendation

Covid-19 has shown the importance of contingency plans being matched to the production characteristics for the species, most notably the time to point of sale, to protect the welfare of animals.

Specific issues

19. Fluctuating demand, e.g. stopping of exports and loss of wholesale outlets such as restaurants and canteens, resulting from Covid-19 may lead to overstocking on farm and associated welfare risks for all livestock species.
20. Overstocking of sheep could occur due to falling wholesale demand, and if there is insufficient forage to sustain animals through the season, in particular in upland areas, nutritional intake and health might be reduced.
21. A sudden reduction in the demand for poultry has led to overstocking on farm, increased thinning and shortened turnarounds. As a prime example of a just-in-time industry the ability to remove birds from farms exactly when needed for the supply chain is crucial.
22. Beef processing capacity and potentially consumption may also see similar market effects, but these are likely to be less significant for prime beef animals which will likely be 'stored' until the price returns to normal. However, there may be unbalanced sales of beef carcasses such as more forequarter sales than hindquarter sales, a lot of which would have gone into catering. This could lead to animals having to be held on farm when cold storage facilities, which are already reported to be close to capacity, become full.
23. From a companion animal perspective there are also concerns regarding small animals such as rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils and mice. At any one time there are 80,000 small animals in the supply chain either in gestation or growth stage (based on the Pet Food Manufacturers'

Association population figures). Normal market demand is *circa* 8000 animals a week. If retailers completely stop selling animals the breeders will have 8000 animals a week of stock to deal with; reducing this may lead to housing issues or small animals being euthanized.

Personnel

24. The impact of Covid-19 on animal welfare due to personnel issues affects most species of animal covered in this report. While there is limited evidence that some of these have happened, they are 'amber risks' with potentially severe consequences.
25. Less training time for both new and existing staff, such as that provided by trainers in the Poultry Passport Scheme, will impact welfare of animals.
26. The need for slaughterhouse and meat processing plant staff to observe social distancing, and PPE shortages, may negatively impact animal welfare. This may impede monitoring the effectiveness of stunning, and also slow processing speeds such that animals remain in production facilities longer than usual, with knock-on effects of overcrowding in lairages.
27. Staff shortages due to school and nursery closures, sickness and self-isolation, in both general animal care and more specialised roles, are likely to put pressure on both the producer and supply chain workforces, potentially affecting animal health and welfare. For example, staff may be less able to undertake proactive preventative medicine and may potentially fail to detect or treat disease as promptly as usual.
28. With the main shearing period from April to July, there may be insufficient UK shearers to cover the national sheep flock. Both the National Association of Agricultural Contractors (NAAC) and the National Sheep Association (NSA) consider it unlikely that shearers from outside the UK will be able to help with this year's shear. The shearing season may be longer than usual because of this shortage of shearers. Sheep remaining in full fleece longer into the summer are at greater risk of flystrike, lice and impaired mobility, while their lambs may find it harder to suckle.

NAAC/NSA have set up a shearing register and are also drawing up guidelines to assist farmers/contractors.

29. Fewer skilled catchers for broilers, with effects exacerbated by just-in-time systems, may lead to overstocking on farm or increased bird injuries during catching by inexperienced personnel.
30. In the cattle and sheep sector, staff shortages may include mobility scorers and foot trimmers, who undertake important work to reduce and prevent lameness.
31. Finally, the Covid-19 situation is also likely to impact farmer mental health and resilience, potentially reducing their ability to care for their livestock.

Behaviour

32. The need for social distancing of people as a result of Covid-19 is likely to have a negative effect on the behaviour of animals over time, damaging their welfare. This is more of an issue for equines and companion animals.
33. Social distancing has limited people's abilities to care for their horses and interact with them as normal. This is a particular problem with horses at livery. A reduction in riding may result in horses putting on weight, increasing the risk of laminitis if feed is not adjusted accordingly. In due course they may become more excitable when ridden, potentially resulting in injuries to both horse and rider.
34. The increase in people working from home has, in many cases, improved companion animal welfare as animals have more company, more entertainment and more stimulation. However, if owners are hospitalised or unwell this can reduce welfare if there is inadequate supervision.
35. There may be reduced interspecies socialisation for puppies, which is a key determinant for their behaviour as adults. This may be exacerbated by rehoming later than usual. Separation anxiety may also be an issue for dogs once restrictions are eased, but especially for puppies who have not had sufficient socialisation and exposure to being alone.
36. Weight gain from inadequate exercise and the risk of additional feeding given longer periods of closer confinement with self-isolating owners will give rise to future health problems unless weight gains are addressed.

Nutrition

37. Covid-19 has disrupted the supply of domestically and internationally sourced products necessary for farm animal and farmed fish nutrition, as well as increasing price volatility. In addition, the cold weather and flooding in the UK will affect grain harvests and this may then reduce available products for feed and bedding for all farmed species.
38. Traded commodity feeds are likely to suffer disruption too in their logistical supply chains, which may result in short-term price volatility and failure to deliver on time to farm. Reduced workforce owing to illness or social distancing may also impact negatively on feed production and transportation.
39. Welfare of animals may be compromised if core and supplementary feed inputs are reduced or changed. This may be due to undersupply or attempts to reduce costs with associated downstream health issues.
40. For example, poultry feed and specifically some of the minerals and vitamins necessary for healthy growth are globally sourced with a significant proportion coming from China. Organic soya is also imported from China and India. China has blocked exports and India has extended its lock down until 18 May at the time of writing.
41. The cattle sector is very dependent on co-products from national and international manufacturing, and it is likely that the availability of these will decrease in the short to medium term (e.g. brewer's grains). These again may see price volatility, and inappropriate feeding of key production groups of cattle, threatening health and welfare and affecting output.
42. Feed represents about 40% of costs to the trout industry. If there is an increase in overstocking resulting in an increase in feed required, and if the cost of feed also rises, then a cull may be needed.
43. Overstocking cattle and sheep on farms as a result of volatility in both store and cull markets may result in shortages in available grazing. The current low rainfall across the country (with concomitant slow grass growth) may exacerbate this.

Breeding

44. Covid-19 may delay veterinary visits with a wide impact on breeding animals, in particular dairy cattle and equines.
45. With respect to cattle, Covid-19 has hit at the peak spring calving and breeding season. Obstetric cases and especially caesarean sections are very challenging and quite dangerous with less staff allowed to attend in order to comply with social distancing measures.
46. Delaying castration will result in increased risk of misalliance and future obstetrical issues at the end of the gestation period.
47. For companion animals there may be an increase in the number of kittens born given that neutering has reduced. There is likely to be uncontrolled breeding in some areas where control programmes have had to stop.
48. A rise in the incidence of uncontrolled dogs harming farm animals, notably sheep and lambs, has been reported.

Transport

49. Owing to Covid-19 the food transport industry is vulnerable to a loss of staff across the logistics chain, whether drivers, trans-shipment personnel, or planners, impacting animal welfare through increased wait times and personnel less experienced in animal transport.
50. The aquatic industry has been affected by supply chain problems as movement of ornamental aquatic animals through well-established national and international supply chains has reduced. This may lead to mass euthanasia of stocks if they can't be moved on and if the cost of their care is deemed uneconomic.
51. Reduced slaughter capacity may result in longer transport distances for cattle (such as cull dairy cows and Holstein bulls) and longer waits for slaughter.

Slaughter

52. Supply chain issues owing to Covid-19 may impact on animal welfare at slaughter. Issues relevant to all livestock concerns centre on reduced numbers of trained staff due to the difficulty of social distancing in 'elbow-to-

elbow' work. This may have knock-on effects on animal welfare by slowing processing speeds with animals left in lairage for longer. Animals may also need to travel to an alternative slaughterhouse with increased journey time, as mentioned above.

53. The halal sheep trade has reduced as a result of loss of catering demand. This has resulted in a restricted market for cull ewes meaning overstocking may develop on farm as lambs are weaned. This may be exacerbated if halal slaughter is limited owing to lack of slaughterhouse capacity. Some abattoirs may also stop offering a private kill service and illegal slaughter may increase if this service is not provided to farmers.
54. The trout industry may need to cull fry in order to make space in the hatchery owing to unsold stock from reduced demand.
55. Initial uncertainty about the demand for gamebirds for this year's shooting season gave rise to concerns as to whether out of season culling of breeding stock was legal. Whilst the birds are being reared, they are under the control of man and thus there would be cases where the producer would have an obligation under the Animal Welfare Act [2006](#) to cull in order to prevent unnecessary suffering.

Health

56. Farm visit frequency by animal care specialists has decreased due to reduced staff availability and social distancing, leading to reduction in activities such as foot trimming and vaccination and an increase in more acute veterinary treatment. Herd and flock preventative health schemes to reduce future welfare problems have also temporarily been put on hold due to social distancing and self-isolation requirements.
57. Reduced laboratory capacity due to personnel availability may lead to less disease monitoring and potentially increased disease incidence affecting animal health.
58. Surveillance such as bovine tuberculosis (bTB) testing has been complicated by Covid-19, especially testing youngstock which are often physically held by farmers for vets to inject. Herd health meetings that bring together farm advisor teams on farm to observe animals and

environment are being compromised. A lack of PPE, slaughterhouse staff and official veterinarians owing to Covid-19 may have impacted the capacity of Tb reactor slaughterhouses, resulting in longer journey times. Currently Tb reactor animals in England and Wales are only processed in 3 slaughterhouses.

59. Insufficient numbers of UK shearers owing to Covid-19 may impact on sheep welfare as shearing is essential for sheep health and welfare. Excess wool impedes the ability of sheep to regulate their body temperatures resulting in overheating and death. Urine, faeces and other material tangled in wool attracts flies resulting in flystrike, which can cause suffering and even death. There is the added risk of a sheep 'becoming cast', rolling onto her side or back and being unable to get up. Lambs can find it harder to suckle if excess wool is not cut back. Shearing this year on individual farms will almost inevitably be slower, which may cause additional stress to sheep held in pens for longer periods as they wait to be sheared.
60. Routine vaccinations, in particular for companion animals and horses, have been suspended because of advice that carrying them out does not meet the requirements for essential travel under current lockdown restrictions. Concern is growing as to the length of the delay before they can start again and the risk of disease spread once social distancing rules are relaxed. There are also concerns about reductions in staff availability for routine vaccination of poultry.
61. Trekking and horse display teams gain most of their income in the summer from tourism which is likely to be greatly reduced. There will potentially be issues in the future with too many horses and insufficient funds for feed and veterinary care.
62. In-person audits and inspections are in some cases being replaced by less rigorous remote methods (e.g. Red Tractor live-streamed farm audits), potentially impacting animal health and welfare.
63. It has been indicated that vehicle approval applications have reduced. In the long term this may reduce capacity for transport of animals to slaughterhouses meaning longer time in lairage, as well as the risk of unsafe vehicles being used to transport animals. There is currently

reduced capacity for the assessment of WATOK licenses owing to APHA making assessments contingent on an assessment to make sure they can be done safely and in line with social distancing measures. These measures may impact on animal health through handling by inexperienced staff, causing distress and injury. It is important that where there is greater use of inexperienced operatives that supervision is increased.

64. There is concern about the risk to animal health from the rapid reduction in the availability of wood shavings and saw dust used for bedding and the alternative use of straw, particularly if used for poultry, i.e. risk of Apergillolosis.

Charities, Rescue Centres and Educational Farms

65. Charities, rescues centres and educational farms are likely to experience reduced income. This is owing to multiple factors such as reduced corporate/grant support, cessation of community events, reduced income from entrance fees, reduced donations due to socio-economic deprivation and reduced income from homing fees/donations. Fundraising concerns may impact on the viability of charities' existence if financial pressures continue long term.
66. Animal rescue organisations may then face resourcing shortfalls but continue to take in or keep animals, leading to overcrowding, inappropriate housing and high animal to personnel ratios. Large numbers of animals may need rehoming owing to closure of businesses such as riding schools, a rise in abandoned pets and over-capacity amongst breeders.
67. Increased numbers of animals will also increase charities' veterinary costs, and pet owners may increase their demand for subsidised vet treatment through charities as personal incomes fall.
68. There may also be a potential reduction in rehoming capacity due to social distancing (e.g. adopters cannot visit rehoming centres), or operational changes such as sending animals out to fosterers and charities collecting cats (e.g. including from within private homes of patients with suspected Covid-19).

69. Charities have expressed concerns that the need for ongoing animal care means their costs continue whilst they cannot furlough animal care staff.
70. Many shelters are working at full or high capacity and are having to apply higher levels of euthanasia than they would normally in order to maintain the welfare of animals in their care. This is due to problems with rehoming, or minimal placements via fostering systems for otherwise potentially rehoming animals.

Veterinary profession

71. Owing to Covid-19 and social distancing requirements the availability of veterinary services is limited, only being provided in-person for services that are needed to maintain the food supply chain and for emergency conditions, including the relief of pain and suffering. Telephone consultations are being used to triage cases. Restrictions to face-to-face treatment are likely to result in a backlog of routine procedures such as small animal vaccinations (such as parvovirus for dogs), regular health checks and neutering. This delay is being reported as leading to more acutely ill animals being seen when the condition has become more advanced. This will result in greater pain and suffering, increased risk of animals not responding to treatment, and as a result an increased likelihood of the use of euthanasia. This reduction in ability to provide treatment is having adverse economic impacts on veterinary practices and concern has been expressed about the long-term effects on the provision of veterinary services.
72. Veterinary businesses are starting to see more client debt than usual.
73. Whilst telemedicine is increasingly becoming accepted and rising in popularity in some sectors during the pandemic, it has its limitations and may not be fit for purpose once the pandemic is over because it doesn't reliably ensure animal health and welfare.
74. Livestock welfare may also be harmed as some farmers delay calling a vet, resulting in less successful outcomes as disease progression is by then more advanced. Routine tasks such as castration and disbudding, and technician services such as vaccination/worming, have been disrupted.

Crucially, diagnostic services linked to responsible use of medicine strategies have also been affected.

Supplies

75. Spare parts needed for livestock management systems may become difficult and expensive to source, particularly if they originate from abroad. For example, some spare parts for poultry house management systems, ventilation, feeding and drinking commonly originate in US, Holland, Denmark and China. This also applies to building materials for new facilities which can be difficult to obtain if building suppliers are closed for an extended period.
76. Chemical availability has been reduced. For example, lead times and delivery times for disinfectant are longer than normal and this may increase disease risk. Farmers are also finding diesel fuel orders have a long lead time to delivery, often two weeks, which may adversely impact animal welfare if housing is mechanically cleaned out or bedded.
77. There have been difficulties obtaining bedding materials for livestock, such as wood shavings for poultry litter as the majority of saw mills are shut. However, care must be taken to ensure that straw (chopped) used as a replacement is 'clean'. Straw stored outdoors must be avoided, otherwise this could lead to Aspergillosis. Straw is also needed for the bedding of pigs, but if bedding products used by other livestock sectors are in short supply this may impact on straw availability for pigs if it is used as a replacement for other species.
78. The competition for supplies of personal protection equipment (PPE) has resulted in difficulties in all sectors but most particularly in those where it is routinely used for the preparation of feedstuffs, i.e. feed mills, and also for catching teams within the poultry industries.

Conclusions and Recommendations

79. Early concerns that Covid-19 restrictions would have a severe effect on animal welfare have not been borne out in the short term. However, many

areas have been identified as requiring careful monitoring and will be the subject of AWC's follow-on opinion.

80. The recurring single biggest concern for animal welfare is that of the ability for all businesses and charities involved with animals to continue to provide their services and to the standards expected and required given the given the severity of the effects of the lockdown. Whether markets, abattoirs, veterinary practices, kennels or charities, etc., the effect of the self-isolation and social distancing restrictions on staffing and cash flow is the repeated concern determining their ability to provide the health and welfare services, in both the short term and the longer term.
81. The importance of contingency planning and regularly updating and testing plans has to be emphasised³ and should be urgently attended to in case there is a return to lockdown and new restrictions have to be put in place.
82. There is evidence that there has been an increase in the number of animals culled, which, while it may be an ethical concern, is not in itself a welfare issue if carried out correctly.
83. Vaccination programmes need to recommence before increased social mixing of animals occurs.
84. The consequences of farmer/owner/carer physical and mental well-being for the welfare of their animal(s) are considerable.
85. Farmer networks and charities promoting good mental health should be supported.
86. All animal owners, in the event of them being taken ill or hospitalised, need to have agreed and recorded in a readily available form who will take care of their animals. In the case of farm stock this should be part of any assurance scheme standard and a herd health planning requirement. All necessary information for the care of the animals under consideration should also be recorded.
87. Government should aid the dissemination of advice about how to ensure that animals can be handled safely whilst maintaining necessary social distancing.

³ FAWC opinion on Contingency Planning for Farm Animal Welfare in Disasters and Emergencies, 2012

88. The effect of Covid-19 restrictions has indicated the need for a full understanding of the likely effects of an action taken centrally by government on the keeping of animals and their health and welfare. This is particularly well demonstrated with the direct effect of the lockdown on the catering industry and its knock-on effects on the production of foodstuffs derived from animals.
89. Charities undertake a large amount of animal welfare work. The loss of income from their inability to undertake normal fundraising activities and the continuing necessary expenditure for those charities that undertake direct keeping of animals, is putting a severe strain on their ability to continue. If closures were to occur the effect would be felt by local government and nationally. Close liaison with the sector is important now.
90. The longer that significant social-distancing and self-isolation restrictions are in place the greater the likelihood of effects on animal health and welfare and the greater the need to find ways in which these effects can be reduced.

APPENDIX 1 - Membership of AWC 2020

Peter Jinman – Chairman
Martin Barker
Dr Andy Butterworth
Richard Cooper
Dr Jane Downes
Dr Troy Gibson
Dr David Grumett
Dr Carmen Hubbard
Richard Jennison
Richard Kempsey
Dr Dorothy McKeegan
Dr Romain Pizzi
Dr Pen Rashbass
Debbie Stanton
Mark White
Professor Sarah Wolfensohn
Dr James Yeates

AWC Secretariat

Alexandra Tocu
Imogen Gibbins

We would also like to thank the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England, the Wales Animal Health & Welfare Framework Group and the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission for their assistance.



© Crown copyright 2020

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v.3. To view this licence visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/ or email PSI@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication will be available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/animal-welfare-committee-awc>

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at awcsecretariat@defra.gsi.gov.uk