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Farmers support improving their care of farmed animals based on scientific evidence of benefits to the animals.

Background

The welfare of farmed animals is on the political agenda of developed countries around the world. Pressure to increase agricultural productivity and increasing wealth and consumer choice has nurtured awareness of the welfare of animals over many decades.

Recent events such as export of live animals to the Middle East and comments from celebrities on farming practices have put animal welfare in the control of the media, therefore not all consumers know what farmers are actually doing.

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What are Farmers Doing about Animal Welfare?

Farmers and scientists have found that animals with poor welfare are not going to produce a high volume and quality of goods for sale. With retailers being so competitive, farmers must act in a way which improves their income, this means that the care of animals is one key to a profitable farm.

A number of programs founded on scientific research are currently being followed by farmers.

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- Voluntary “Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals” published by the CSIRO for all animals. They state the best practices which should be adopted by farmers. They are national documents and are regularly reviewed by a committee of state and federal governments, RSPCA, animal rights groups, vets and farmers.
- State governments have legislated parts of these codes and there is a commitment from state governments and farmers that more parts will become law in the future.
- Industries have developed their own voluntary quality assurance programs including the beef, lamb, dairy, egg and pig industries. These programs are driven by better prices, greater demand or greater market security for those producers audited by an independent third party.
- Some industries are currently developing accreditation for animal handlers such as those that farm pigs or mules sheep.
- The live animal export industry is helping their overseas customers in developing worlds to improve their treatment of animals.
- Research creates new ideas for more research and industry is contributing to funding projects such as alternatives to mulesing, different types of housing for pigs and laying hens, stocking densities, transport times, pain relief and animal handling.

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A number of farmers have identified an ethical market for their produce. Options such as free range eggs are available at higher prices which reflect increased risk for the farmers of a lower quantity, greater variability in quality or higher costs of production.