Working in Asia to help improve animal welfare

By Michelle Sinclair

CAWE scientists are currently leading a ground breaking international animal welfare project; working with partners in Asia to build awareness around improving animal welfare at slaughter and during transport.

Director of UQ’s Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics Professor Clive Phillips and project manager Michelle Sinclair have returned from a mission to China, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia, where they were joined by other internationally-recognised animal welfare experts.

Much of South-East and East Asia did not yet have legislation or monitoring for animal welfare, so we aimed to increase awareness about the international animal welfare guidelines set out by the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE), which also supports this project.

In those countries with new legislation, such as Thailand, they are actively developing codes of practice and infrastructure. In addition to Asia’s changing animal welfare legal landscape, the global trade of live production animals and animal products is increasing. Coupling that with growing public and consumer concerns for environment and animal welfare, the time is right to collaboratively improve welfare in the region.

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The project has included workshops with government officials, senior veterinarians and university lecturers in each country, and workshops with key industry stakeholders. The project also undertakes studies to better understand the attitudes of key stakeholders such as slaughter workers and vets towards livestock transport and slaughter. We also now have considerable resource packages created in each language and freely available online (website below).

Despite regional differences, the project countries all had a common desire to improve the animal welfare standards in their country.

One of the biggest challenges for improving welfare during slaughter in Asia, however, is that of monitoring due to the vast difference between large, often government-run, slaughterhouses and the smaller locally run operations.

The project has been supported by our partner, Universiti Putra Malaysia, as well as the Australian, New Zealand and Malaysian governments, World Animal Protection, World Organisation for Animal Health and the European Union, and we will be looking for further support to extend the programme to another 4 countries over the next few years.

More information and translated resource packages can be found at;

http://www.animalwelfarestandards.org/

Measuring racehorse welfare

Research by Glen McTaggart

Glen is not just a racehorse breeder, she’s passionately concerned about the welfare of the Thoroughbred Racehorse. She’s developed a welfare index for Thoroughbred Racehorses using the expert opinion of stakeholders in the industry. The index looks at a range of welfare issues and different levels of performance. Not satisfied with having developed the index, Glen has validated it using an extensive survey of racehorse behaviour in stables throughout SE Queensland and tested it with a range of trainers around Australia. Glen hopes the index will improve thoroughbred racehorse industry practices, lower wastage within the industry, improve industry profitability, improve the safety of riders and workers and improve the public’s perception of the industry.

‘I’m creating a welfare index aimed at improving thoroughbred racehorse practices and reducing wastage’
The importance of researching animal welfare in live trade

by Prof. Clive Phillips

There are many injustices in the world today but none are as shameful to the human race as the abuse that we inflict on many of the animals that we use in the animal industries. Animals feed us, clothe us, entertain us and do everything that we demand of them. Surely we owe them a decent life? In this newsletter we focus on CAWE’s work on transport and slaughter. The live export industry is developing worldwide, with international markets growing rapidly, in particular as a result of the rising affluence in Asia. As long as the industry exists, we believe that it is important to try to improve the welfare of livestock during the lengthy and arduous process. CAWE has two PhD students, Yu Zhang and Grisel Navarro, working on livestock export, attempting to understand their responses on the ships to ammonia that accumulates from excreta and ship movement better, in order that we can suggest ways of reducing the stress to livestock.

Sheep welfare at sea - ammonia
Research by Yu Zhang

As the world’s most frequently transported live animals, sheep have been primarily transported from Australia to the Middle East by sea. Reduced feed intake has been identified as one main cause of sheep deaths during sea transport. Ranking as 1 of the top 5 welfare problems rated by veterinarians, livestock exporters, and ship owners, ammonia accumulation during the voyage is known to reduce feed intake, as well as being detrimental to the health and performance of animals. PhD student Yu Zhang has just completed experimentation aimed at investigating the mechanisms involved of this adverse effect on feed intake, with the hope that measures can be put in place that will reduce the problem during the live trade.

Sheep welfare at sea - stocking density
Research by Grisel Navarro

A major concern about live export centres on the high stocking densities that animal experience for long periods – little more than the physical space that the animals occupy. CAWE PhD student Grisel is comparing different stocking densities in order to measure physiological and behavioural responses under conditions of simulated ship motion. With access to live export shipments restricted, the researchers have developed a moving floor that simulates ship motion, with the sheep held in a cage on the floor. Sheep are being offered the standard stocking rate, or one with 10 or 20% more space. Stress is measured from heart rate monitors and videocameras record the sheep’s every movement. Professor Ramazan Col from Turkey is visiting CAWE for 12 months to help with the study and intern students from Europe will help with the analysis of the large amount of film that accumulates. The results will determine what benefit sheep get from extra space on board ship and if this is substantial it is hoped that the industry will revise its practices to make better conditions for the animals on board.

LEFT; Grisel makes friends with her fellow researchers
CAWE Recommended Read

Trade is an inevitable part of human activity and evolution, but when it involves animals there are important ethical issues that have to be considered.

Controversial and thought—provoking, this text focuses on the trade in live and dead animals and animal parts. The book describes welfare, environmental, economic and cultural issues around this trade, debating important ethical considerations for veterinarians and all those involved in animal welfare. Published by CABI (sales@cabi.org).

‘The Animal Trade’
by Clive J.C Phillips (available September 2015)

CAWE Update

School of Veterinary Science, UQ

ABOUT THE CENTRE
The Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics (CAWE) conducts relevant and innovative research and aids in the development of improved practices, guidelines and management strategies to protect animals, enhance their health and ensure their welfare. CAWE’s mission is to identify ethical issues and improve Animal Welfare knowledge and practices, through solid research, education, and collaboration that recognizes the cultural diversity of human-animal interaction.

Talking for the Animals
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CAWE
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Calf roping is one of the most contentious practices in Australian rodeo. In collaboration with the Australian Pro-Rodeo Association, CAWE researchers have investigated behaviour and stress responses to standard roping practices. This study is currently pending publication so stay tuned!