



UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

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Public Willing to Pay for Better Pig Welfare **31st January 2005**

A study in a leading scientific journal shows that the average consumer is willing to pay up to almost five percent extra on their weekly grocery bill if it benefits animal welfare.

The paper is published in *Animal Welfare* (Vol 14, pages 61-69) produced by scientific charity the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare. The study by Catherine A Glass from Queen's University, Belfast and colleagues George Hutchinson and Violet Beattie investigated whether people are willing to pay extra for pork if the welfare of pigs is improved. The research provides crucial information for policy makers shaping initiatives to improve conditions for intensively farmed pigs.

The study's focus was on valuing welfare for growing pigs in intensive production systems. Willingness to pay was sought for increases in space, environmental enrichment to encourage natural behaviour and for research into improved housing for the pigs. Benefits include reducing aggressive behaviour such as cannibalism and tail biting. Doubling space for pigs was welcomed the most, with the provision of rooting materials such as straw or peat and other bedding materials also considered beneficial.

The study showed that despite being given strong alternatives for consideration such as more hospital beds and measures to curb pollution, 76% of respondents consider animal welfare to be a very (39%) or moderately important (37%) government goal.

Pork consumption levels amongst respondents were high with 65% eating it at least twice weekly although 67% said welfare was not an issue at point of purchase.

Some 56% of respondents said they had not been exposed to farm animal welfare issues in the media. However, for those who had read about welfare issues or seen documentaries, it affected

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the purchasing decisions or attitudes to farm animals of 39% of them. The positive impact of such media coverage included buying free-range eggs, eating white meat only and becoming vegetarian.

The questionnaire was piloted in three stages: preliminary face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions; a face-to-face pilot study of draft versions and finally a postal pre-test of the questionnaire to the general public. Three hundred pre-test questionnaires were sent to a random sample of Northern Irish residents drawn from the electoral register, of whom almost 50% responded. The final survey was sent to 2,000 Northern Ireland households.

The final survey questionnaire asked respondents to rank animal welfare improvements alongside other government priorities. They were given a brief description of the welfare problems facing pigs and possible solutions. A description of the proposed payment method was given which comprised a small percentage general food levy, and respondents were given the chance to opt in or out of such a scheme.

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Notes to Editors

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (www.ufaw.org.uk) is an internationally recognised, independent, scientific and educational charity. It promotes high standards of welfare for all animals including wild, captive, farm, laboratory animals and pets. It depends on members and supporters for all funding. UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarship schemes; by public education especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, articles, technical reports and in its quarterly scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to government departments including the drafting of legislation and guidelines, and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals.

“Improvements in the care of animals are not now likely to come of their own accord, merely by wishing them: there must be research and it is in sponsoring research of this kind, making its results widely known, that UFAW performs one of its most valuable services.” (Sir Peter Medawar, CBE, FRS, 8th May 1957 – Nobel Laureate (1960), Chairman of the UFAW Scientific Advisory Committee 1951-1962)

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