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The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,
Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK
www.ufaw.org.uk

Animal Welfare 2012, 21: 397-401
ISSN 0962-7286
doi: 10.7120/09627286.21.3.397

Challenges to implementing animal welfare standards in New Zealand

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Abstract

The New Zealand Animal Welfare Act 1999 imposes a duty of care on all owners and persons in charge, to provide for the physical, health and behavioural needs of the animals in their care. The Act provides for the development of codes of welfare by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) and gives legal status to the minimum standards that they contain when issued by the Minister of Agriculture. Codes are used to promote appropriate behaviour, establish minimum standards of animal care and encourage best practice by those in charge of animals. One of the main challenges in developing codes of welfare is to integrate the various, and often conflicting, social, ethical, economic and production management value judgments, with the available science, in a way that does not stifle innovation or require frequent alteration of the codes. In New Zealand we believe this is best achieved using minimum standards which are designed as animal-orientated statements of desired welfare outcomes, accompanied by one or more indicators by which achievement of the outcome can be measured or objectively assessed. Codes are primarily directed at educating the owners or persons in charge of animals of their legal obligations, encouraging voluntary compliance, and supporting industries in the development of compliance and quality assurance programmes. The challenge is to develop a consistent, whole-of-system approach to animal welfare compliance that focuses on interventions which encourage voluntary compliance or deter non-compliance before offending becomes serious and animal welfare is unnecessarily compromised. The aim of this paper is to describe New Zealand's policy, which is to develop outcome-based welfare standards, to promote and demonstrate maximum voluntary industry compliance with them, and to ensure that any serious breaches are detected and responded to effectively.

Keywords: animal welfare, codes, compliance, implementation, New Zealand, standards