

© 2016 Universities Federation for Animal Welfare  
 The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,  
 Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK  
 www.ufaw.org.uk

*Animal Welfare* 2016, 25: 21-28  
 ISSN 0962-7286  
 doi: 10.7120/09627286.25.1.021

## **Attitudes of veterinary students in Croatia toward farm animal welfare**

*M Ostović<sup>\*†</sup>, Ž Mesić<sup>‡</sup>, T Mikuš<sup>§</sup>, K Matković<sup>†</sup> and Ž Pavičić<sup>†</sup>*

<sup>†</sup> Department of Animal Hygiene, Behaviour and Welfare, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Zagreb, Heinzelova 55, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia

<sup>‡</sup> Department of Marketing in Agriculture, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

<sup>§</sup> Animal Welfare Office, Croatian Veterinary Institute, Zagreb, Croatia

\* Contact for correspondence and requests for reprints: mostovic@vef.hr

### **Abstract**

*This survey was undertaken to assess the attitudes of Croatian veterinary students regarding farm animal welfare issues. The study included students of all undergraduate years at the only Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Croatia. First-year students were surveyed twice, ie before and after attending the course on animal welfare, using a written questionnaire containing statements with a five-point Likert scale for choice of answers. Students consider good animal welfare necessary for sustainability of farming systems and food quality and safety, ranking particular issues in the following order: biological functioning > natural living > emotional states. Students also believe that cattle and pigs have greater cognitive abilities and that their welfare is less compromised in comparison with poultry, whereas standard management procedures performed in pig production are perceived as more humane than beak-trimming in poultry. In addition, students tend to consider pain in farm animals caused by management procedures only when these procedures involved the affliction of significant pain. There were no differences between attitude scores on most of the statements from first-year students before and after the course. Furthermore, for the majority of statements, the mean responses were lower in final-year students, suggesting a lower level of empathy toward farm animals. Although similar results have also been recorded elsewhere in the world, these results raise concerns as to the ability of these future veterinarians to promote good farm animal welfare in the country and abroad. The results also suggest a need to modify veterinary student education in Croatia in the field of farm animal welfare.*

**Keywords:** *animal welfare, attitudes, Croatia, farm animals, survey, veterinary students*