



Media Release

From the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)

27th October, 2011. For Immediate Release:

Scientific evidence calls for improved housing for beef cattle

In a recent paper published in the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) journal *Animal Welfare*, author Professor Beat Wechsler of the Swiss Federal Veterinary Office reviews scientific studies over the last 10 years on the effects of floor quality and space allowance on the welfare of beef cattle, and concludes that both should be improved.

Intensive beef production in Europe is characterised by the housing of finishing cattle in pens with fully slatted concrete floors and high stocking densities. In 2001, at the request of the European Commission, the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare published a report in which it recommended that “fully slatted concrete or wooden floors should not be used” and that “the minimum space allowance should be 3m² for an animal expected to reach 500 kg plus or minus 0.5m² for each 100 kg difference expected between 400 kg and 800 kg”. However, to date there has been no European Council Directive relating to minimum standards for finishing beef cattle, and fully slatted concrete floors and space allowances lower than those recommended by the Committee are still permitted in the few EU member states with national legislation addressing these aspects of beef cattle housing.

In his paper, Professor Wechsler reviews scientific studies conducted over the past 10 years (ie since the Scientific Committee’s report) into the effects of floor quality and space allowance on various welfare indicators such as lying behaviour, animal preference, leg and tail lesions, claw health, mortality, animal cleanliness, and, importantly from the farmers’ point of view, growth performance. He concludes that the studies offer clear and consistent evidence that housing finishing bulls and steers in pens with fully slatted concrete floors and low space allowance adversely affects welfare and growth performance – and support the recommendations made in 2001 by the Scientific Committee.

Professor Wechsler believes that the scientific evidence supports the notion that insufficient attention is paid to the welfare of finishing bulls and steers: “Whereas the public is concerned about the housing conditions of poultry and pigs, the situation of finishing beef cattle is often ignored, and there are no EU standards dealing with floor quality and space allowance... From a scientific point of view, this discrepancy is not justified”.

The peer-reviewed journal *Animal Welfare* is published quarterly by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW), an independent scientific and educational charity that promotes and supports animal welfare science worldwide.

For further details of the journal and other UFAW activities visit www.ufaw.org.uk or contact UFAW, The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN, telephone 01582 831818, email ufaw@ufaw.org.uk.

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SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE

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Notes to Editors:

UFAW

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) is an internationally recognised, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity. It works to improve knowledge and understanding of animals' needs in order to achieve high standards of welfare for farm, companion, research, captive wild animals and those with which we interact in the wild.

UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarships; by educational initiatives, especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, reports and in its scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to governments and others, including for legislation and 'best practice' guidelines and codes; and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals.

This work relies on the support of members, subscribers and donors.

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