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Aquaculture—Now, Factory Fish Farming

M.W. Fox

"Aquaculture 1983" was the title of a 5-day symposium and industry exhibit held in Washington, D.C., on January 9-13, 1983, sponsored by World Mariculture Society, Catfish Farmers of America, Fish Culture Section of the American Fisheries Society, U.S. Trout Farmers Association, Shellfish Institute of North America, and National Shellfisheries Association. While ecologists, economists, futurologists, and others have touted the virtues and potential of intensive fish and shellfish farming, this growing industry in the U.S. may become blighted by the same problems that have come to afflict agribusiness—"factory farming" of crops, livestock, and poultry.

Industry exhibits told the story—there were displays on herbicides and algicides to control the proliferation of plant life in overstocked and polluted fish ponds, and aeration systems to help alleviate pollution from fish excrement and rotting food in the water. Antibiotics such as tetracycline and sulphonamides were promoted for incorporation into feed, along with other drugs to control fish parasites and fungal infections. And a variety of autogenous bacterins (vaccines) were also sold, in order to rectify intrinsically unsound husbandry practices. But does the U.S. really need more animal protein, at potential risk to consumer health from drug residues in fish and shellfish produced, and from antibiotic-resistant bacterial strains? Especially when aquaculture means new costs to consumers, who pay for the federal agencies that regulate chemical and drug residue levels and who thus help indirectly to subsidize chemical farming? And what of the welfare of the fish that are confined in crowded, polluted, chemical- and drug-saturated tanks and ponds? The possibility of "organic" and humane aquaculture, without overstocking and overdose of drugs, fades into improbability, as the values and economic structure of the rest of agribusiness begin to saturate this fledging industry.

And an interesting postscript: One exhibit from the College of Veterinary Medicine, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, solicited donations to help support the University's Florida Foundation Gator Fund to develop new techniques in alligator production.

Achieving a Consensus on Dog Control Strategies: A Brief Primer

D.B. Wilkins

The welfare arguments surrounding dog ownership may not stimulate the same passionate fervor as those relating to the use of animals in experiments, factory farming, or the hunting of live animals with hounds, but nevertheless, they are matters of real concern to most welfare organizations.

The most serious problems are caused through irresponsible ownership, which leads to overbreeding and the inevitable consequence of large numbers of stray and unwanted dogs.

The symptoms of the stray-dog problem vary from country to country and area to area. In many, disease is the most important aspect, with rabies predominating. But in many Mediterranean countries, echinococcosis has been causing considerable concern. The island of Cyprus is a case in point. There, the high incidence of this disease among dogs necessitated massive destruction of all unwanted animals. (The dog control scheme carried out in Cyprus is chronicled by K. Polydorou elsewhere in this issue.) In other parts of the world, particularly the large cities of Europe and North America, the antisocial issues involving strays are important. Examples include fenes fouling of pedestrian areas and sports fields and the destruction of garbage containers.

The one common factor among all these variables is that the stray dog is inevitably suffering, whether from injury, disease, food and water deprivation, neglect, or some combination of two or more of these hardships.

It is primarily for this reason that responsible welfare organizations should and do become involved in discussions over the introduction of dog control measures aimed essentially at punishing the incorrigible, irresponsible dog owner, breeder, or dealer. The difficulty to be faced is the extent to which legislative measures should go to try and solve the stray-dog problem. All too often, there will be considerable differences of opinion among welfareists themselves on this issue, particularly when there is a risk that a certain proportion of the dog-owning public will vociferously accuse them of supporting the anti-dog lobby.

However, while advocating no action at all is an easy and comfortable option in these circumstances, this is a policy that helps no one, least of all the stray dogs themselves. Conversely, there is a very real risk of being drawn into supporting a legislative measure that is being introduced to alleviate the symptoms of a problem, without any provisions for attempting to unravel and solve their underlying causes. For example, a complete prohibition of dogs and their owners from all parks and other recreational areas in a large city might solve the fouling problem in these places, but will also result in real suffering for both dogs and their owners. Legislation can, therefore, become counterproductive if it goes too far and results in disadvantages that outweigh the potential advantages.

On the other hand, there are some circumstances that may justify seemingly draconian measures on the basis that the long-term benefits to both the dogs and responsible owners are substantial and outweigh any possible short-term welfare complications.

In France, where rabies has been spreading slowly but surely across the whole country for some years, dog owners have accepted legislation that makes it obligatory in most parts of the country for those who own a dog to have it vaccinated against rabies and tattooed with a centrally registered identification number, a procedure that can be transiently
unpleasant to the dog. In the U.K., there is universal approval for a quarantine policy for all dogs being imported. The suffering that may be caused by the 6-month quarantine is more than justified by the fact that the U.K. is thus kept free of a disease which, if introduced, would lead to infinitely greater suffering.

It is vital, though, to pay proper attention to the role of education in solving the problems of irresponsible dog ownership. Much suffering is caused to dogs (and pets of all kinds) through the ignorance and neglect of certain fundamental principles of care and ownership. Most welfare and veterinary organizations are deeply involved in educational programs, but it is essential that governments, at either national or local levels, become involved as well. The way forward would appear to be through legislative control, properly enforced, which would complement and not contradict an educational program.

In addition, a third and important factor in any dog welfare/control program should be recognition of the necessity of harnessing the support of the majority of dog owners, although there will always be a minority who automatically oppose any forms of control, if only on the principle that they infringe upon individual rights, etc. As a first step, therefore, it is incumbent on governments to work with, and gain the support of, leading welfare, veterinary, and dog organizations.

In the U.K., all leading organizations involved in dog ownership have come together under an umbrella organization (non-governmental), which is entitled the Joint Advisory Committee on Pets in Society (JACOPIS). Recently, this example has been followed in Australia, where it is already beginning to produce beneficial results. Proper consultation between government agencies and the other involved organizations should lead to controls that are properly thought out, responsibly administered, and compassionately enforced. Such controls should then produce positive beneficial results for both dogs and dog owners and will, therefore, be accepted by the vast majority of the general public. The risks from zoonotic diseases will be reduced, and the benefit to humans from owning a dog greatly enhanced.

No responsible dog owner should fear controls that are introduced in this way, but it is necessary that inculcation be continued through various representative organizations, so that any future amendments can result from the same consultative pattern.

News & Analysis

New Assaults on Dogs in the USSR

The Advanced International Studies Institute of Washington, which monitors emerging trends in the Soviet press, has noted a sharp increase in anti-dog letters and articles. Letters that stridently call for "a decree to destroy all dogs" (Sovetskaya Rossia, September 16, 1982), or declare that "only service dogs are needed; the others do not have the right to food, and consequently, to life" seem to be motivated by three critical factors: (1) poor to nonexistent dog-control measures; (2) problems in food distribution related to periodic food shortages and troubles with the machinery of the planned economy; (3) an attitude toward dogs that is a great extent the obverse of that in the West—dogs are viewed by a sizeable sector of the populace as pariahs, and by many others as game animals.

In its September 16th edition, Sovetskaya Rossia admonished dog owners that they were accountable for a number of social ills: "undisciplined pet owners," the newspaper claimed, were permitting dogs to wander freely throughout city parks and streets, biting pedestrians and littering the roads. For 1980, Pravda reported that 190,000 people stated that they had been bitten by dogs, and another 500,000 said they were attacked. While Soviet law stipulates that only city dog-catchers and "special brigades of communal and veterinary services" are allowed "to hunt down stray animals," this task seems to have been usurped by private citizens—for example, an army major, who, as reported in the military paper Red Star (September 9, 1982), used dogs as target practice.

Further, to the common man, ownership of dogs is regarded as a distinctly anti-proletarian habit, whereby "thousands of tons of food" that could have been used to feed humans is shunted to "unproductive animals." In fact, Pravda (July 2, 1981) did assert that dog owners benefit from government subsidies to the tune of about 1.5 billion rubles ($2 billion) a year, because the retail price of meat in the Soviet Union is held at a level that represents only half of the actual production costs.

Finally, the general tenor of Soviet feelings toward dogs is perhaps best reflected by a single datum: the brisk trade in dog pelts that exists within that nation. At the moment, dog fur hats (selling at about $260 per hat) are an especially lucrative item. As reported in the trend-setting Sovetskaya Rossia, "dog skin hats are a real hit among young people of both sexes."

Just How Free Is a "Free-Range" Chicken?

It's always easier to think of things in terms of simple dichotomies like good and evil, summer and winter, freedom and slavery. But most often, a whole spectrum of gray realities lies in between any set of abstract extremes. In the instance of laying hens, we are likely to envision the densely packed battery cage at one end of the spectrum, while the image of contented chickens enjoying the liberty and sunshine of an old-fashioned farm emerges when we consider the term "free-range." Unfortunates, as usual, life is not that straightforward, since there are an increasing number of new systems that purport to be housing "free-range" chickens whereas, in truth, they may not meet the minimum welfare requirements for consideration as legitimate free-range housing. The problem of coming up with a workable definition of "free-range" (as opposed to "deep litter," etc.) has recently been the focus of several decisions made in U.K. courts.