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22 October 2009

FAWC PRESS RELEASE

FARM ANIMAL WELFARE COUNCIL'S OPINION ON THE WELFARE OF THE DAIRY COW

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) today launched its Opinion on the Welfare of the Dairy Cow on its website.

Professor Wathes, Chairman of FAWC, said "This Opinion aims to review the welfare of the dairy cow since FAWC's previous report in 1997.

Economic pressures on the dairy industry over the past decade have forced British farmers to seek greater efficiencies, resulting in significant changes in dairy husbandry. Some believe that these developments have compromised the cow's welfare. Certainly, the low profitability of dairy farming has compromised investment and maintenance on many farms which, in turn, may have hindered progress in reducing the incidence of lameness, mastitis and metabolic diseases."

He continued "In our previous report, our main concerns were in relation to endemic diseases, infrastructure and stockmanship. These same concerns persist today and are covered in this Opinion. They can be amalgamated into one question; does the modern dairy cow have an acceptable standard of welfare?"

While there have been many improvements and initiatives in the dairy industry to address key welfare issues since 1997 the evidence is that the welfare of dairy cows has not improved significantly over the past decade.

There are still critical issues about the welfare of the dairy cow to be addressed over the next few years and these are covered in the Opinion. More should be invested in education, skills, training and professional development of both farmers and stockmen. A lifespan of eight years for the dairy cow is already achieved by the best dairy farmers and should be an aspiration of the entire industry."

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Notes for Editors

1. The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) is an independent advisory body established by Government in 1979 to keep under review the welfare of farm animals on agricultural land, at market, in transit and at place of slaughter; and to advise Ministers in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, of any legislative or other changes that may be necessary.
2. The FAWC Chairman, Professor Christopher Wathes, is Chair of Animal Welfare at the Royal Veterinary College, University of London.
3. All FAWC members serve in a personal capacity and do not represent any organisation with which they may be associated.
4. Opinions represent a more recent form of advice reflecting changes within the structure of the Council and in how it presents its advice to Government on farm animal welfare issues. An Opinion is a brief report outlining the major causes of concern for animal welfare and making recommendations for improvement within a restricted scope. The aim is to be responsive to specific issues in a shorter timescale than that needed for the traditional FAWC report.
5. Copies of FAWC Opinions are available on the FAWC website. Approaches for interviews should also be routed through the Secretariat.

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