

Department of Animal Sciences

Duval County Extension Office



4-H MAILBOX POULTRY CLUB

Number 19

END OF ELEVENTH MONTH

ANIMAL WELFARE

The issue of *animal rights* has become very controversial. Although the extremes get most of the publicity, there is actually an entire spectrum of viewpoints on animal welfare.

Anthropomorphism: On one end of the spectrum there is what has been called “anthropomorphism” which results when people transfer human characteristics, behavior, and motivation to animals.

Speciesism: On the opposite end of the spectrum there is what has been called “speciesism”, a prejudice against the interests of members of other species and an attitude that humans can do anything they want to exploit animals of another species since these other animals are not human, do not reason, are less intelligent, and do not have a soul.

Most people’s philosophies on animal rights lie somewhere in between these two extremes. Exposure to philosophies and life forms may profoundly influence one’s evaluation of the controversial animal rights issue. For example, if a person’s only exposure to mice is in children’s books, the person may have more concern over the welfare of mice than someone who has lived in mice-infested housing.

Commercial chicken houses typically have considerable control of temperature, ventilation, and odors, and provide protection of birds from weather and predators. Humans are not nearly as well-fed as commercial chickens, because humans eat what they want to rather than what is good for them. More study, research, money and technology have gone into determining and providing an optimal, nutritious diet for the chicken than for any other animal, including humans.

Interest in animal welfare and animal rights has raised questions about the ethics of commercial animal production management practices. Most of the commercial poultry production practices are considered humane by most people. Changes are being made to improve the animal welfare level. Commercial management practices, for the most part, enhance the birds’ welfare providing comfort, protection, and food with minimum effort expended by the birds.

Much thought, research, and effort has gone into reducing the birds’ stress in commercial poultry production, as stress due to suboptimal conditions has a rapid and severe negative effect on growth and egg production. Although motive is based on economics rather than ethics related to animal welfare, an adequate level of welfare is provided to commercial poultry under current production technology.

A further question that complicates the animal welfare issue is: Which animals are worthy of having “rights” necessitating human concern? A separate continuum of all living things runs parallel to the animal welfare continuum. Start with this continuum and decide where you fit in. That is, which of these forms of life do you believe humans are morally justified in using or killing for their benefit? Which forms of life can experience pain and discomfort? Does an ax cut in the side of a tree hurt? Is it all right to step on an ant; or swat a fly; or poison a rat; or cut grass; or kill coyotes; or slaughter chickens, hogs, and cows; or hunt deer; or kill horses, cats, dogs, monkeys or humans; or milk cows; or keep pet birds in cages; or use animals for research on human and/or animal diseases and surgical procedures; or keep dogs, cats, and horses as pets? Where should the line be drawn?

