

BVA, BCVA, GVS and BVPA position on surplus male production animals

Executive summary

The specialisation of breeds for desirable food production traits, such as high yield milk, meat and egg production, has created a problem of unwanted offspring in some farmed species¹. Many of these animals are killed at a young age, often shortly after birth. This raises ethical issues, although the killing of animals is not a welfare harm per se providing it is carried out humanely.

Sentient animals are capable of experiencing positive and negative feelings such as pain, frustration and contentment. Where animals are used for human benefit this should be exercised with responsibility, and with consideration and compassion for the animals concerned.

The overarching priority should be the five welfare needs, the principle of a life worth living and a humane death. We believe that:

Recommendation 1: Quality of life should always take precedence over lifespan.

Recommendation 2: The dairy and egg industries should aim to move away from the production of surplus animals and seek solutions to the killing of unwanted animals.

Recommendation 3: The dairy and egg industries should adopt a '3 Rs' (reduce, replace, refine) approach to the rearing and slaughter of animals which are surplus to the requirements of the main production requirements of the enterprise.

Recommendation 4: Further research should be carried out into practical methods for reducing the number of unwanted male offspring produced.

Recommendation 5: Although the development of the market for meat from otherwise unwanted male calves and goats should be explored, animals should only be reared for meat if the production system allows for a good life and humane death.

Recommendation 6: The markets for high-welfare UK veal and goat meat should be promoted, to increase demand and reduce the need for on farm slaughter of surplus male animals.

Recommendation 7: Farmers considering exporting animals should first consider the recommendations laid out in the [BVA position on the welfare of livestock during transport](#).

Recommendation 8: Killing must always be undertaken in ways which are humane to reduce animal welfare harms, regardless of economic pressures. Veterinary professionals should inform themselves about how their clients are killing surplus animals and, when necessary, offer guidance on legislative requirements and good practice.

Recommendation 9: Further research should be carried out into practical methods for refinement of on-farm killing methods so that surplus animals are killed as humanely as possible.

Recommendation 10: When animals are killed, the dairy and egg industries should make efforts to ensure the carcass is used to reduce wastage and improve sustainability.

Recommendation 11: The public should have access to reliable factual information on production methods which require routine killing of unwanted healthy animals, in order that the range of harms can be widely understood and to generate public interest in potential solutions.

¹ Wolfschmidt M., Das Schweinesystem: Wie Tiere gequält, Bauern in den Ruin getrieben und Verbraucher getäuscht werden ISBN-10: 3100025466

Recommendation 12: Farm Assurance Schemes should be promoted to better enable customers to make sustainable and ethically informed choices about the food products they buy and the impact of these products on animal health and welfare.

Recommendation 13: Within the context of One Health, the agricultural sector and veterinary profession should promote the benefits of sustainable consumption, the concept of “less and better”, and the benefits of properly valuing quality animal-derived products, where quality encompasses good animal health and welfare, food safety, environmental protection and fair returns for producers.