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**FVE position on killing unwanted offspring
in farm animal production**

FVE POSITION

-The **veterinary profession** believes **we should aim to move away from the production of surplus animals**. We should prompt and support initiatives **to seek solutions to the killing of unwanted animals**, working with other relevant stakeholders; for example, by helping to stimulate consumer understanding of, and demand for, high welfare veal or meat from humanely reared male dairy goats or buffaloes.

- Given the assumption that animals **value quality over quantity of life**, rearing and stimulating markets for otherwise unwanted animals is only beneficial if the reared animals have a good quality of life and a humane death; that is, “a life worth living” (FAWC 2009).

-**FVE calls for further research and practical translation of methods for preventing the killing of healthy animals**, such as *in-ovo* sexing of embryos to enable destruction of embryos and increased availability and commercial viability of sexed semen for dairy cattle.

-**When killing surplus animals is unavoidable**, they must, as for all farmed animals, **be killed humanely and in accordance with relevant legislation**, irrespective of any economic pressures.

- **Veterinarians** should always be involved in **on-farm killing programmes** to ensure high welfare standards when killing surplus animals is unavoidable, and such programmes should **include training of stock persons** who will perform the killing. Veterinary professionals should be aware of how their clients are killing surplus animals and, when necessary, offer guidance on legislative requirements and good practice.

-The treatment that animals are afforded when they are used by humans, including their quality of life and their lifespan, is a matter for society to understand, debate and decide. People who consume animal-derived products are both consumers and citizens in this regard. Veterinary professionals and associations should **provide reliable information to society** on production methods which require routine killing of unwanted healthy animals, in order that this ethical cost can be widely understood and to generate public interest in potential solutions.

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INTRODUCTION

FVE believes that all farmed animals should have a good life and a humane death, and that veterinary professionals should take a leading role in advocating for this in policy and practice (AVMA, CVMA, FVE 2014). A good life incorporates opportunities to perform highly motivated behaviour and to be in good physical health, as conveyed by frameworks such as the Five Freedoms, as well as opportunities for positive experiences such as comfort, contentment and interest.

When animals are used for human benefit, including those that are farmed for food, resulting ethical issues should be recognised and addressed. Where possible, any ethical harms (such as compromised animal welfare) should be eliminated or minimised. It is also appropriate to consider the global impact of the killing and disposal of surplus animals in relation to water, feed and land use and the impacts of the production on the environment and climate change (UN 2015, FVE 2016).

Citizens who consume animal-derived food should be informed of key ethical issues, so that society can make a collective decision on what is justifiable and acceptable. Veterinary professionals and associations, as well as improving animal welfare in practice, should take a lead role in stimulating and informing public debate, and offer evidence-based ways forward.

THE PROBLEM

The specialisation of breeds for desirable food production traits, such as milk, meat and egg production, has created a problem of unwanted offspring in some farmed species.

This problem affects large numbers of male dairy calves (bobby calves) and male chicks of layer strains, as well as smaller numbers of other farmed species such as male dairy goat kids and buffaloes.

Very many of these animals are killed at a young age, often shortly after birth.

The killing of large numbers of healthy, unwanted animals, raises both animal welfare and ethical problems (Appleby 2014). Killing should be undertaken in ways which cause minimal suffering, to reduce animal welfare harms. When achieved, this can overcome animal welfare related concerns. Separately, even if a humane death is achieved, the deliberate breeding and killing of unwanted healthy animals should be subject to ethical analysis and discussion.

Problem overview by selected species: dairy calves, layer strain chicks and dairy species other than cattle

Male dairy calves

Dairy cow strains have been selectively bred for milk production and do not have appropriate genetic traits for economic meat production. Bobby calves are often not considered suitable for typical beef rearing, so are usually either slaughtered (mostly

shot or euthanised on-farm) soon after birth or fattened for slaughter for production of veal (up to 8 months of age, according to European marketing regulations) or young beef/rosé veal (around 8-12 months of age). In some countries, such as some Scandinavian countries male dairy calves are reared until the age of 18-24 months, and constitute a substantial part of national meat production.

A large number of male dairy calves born in EU-27 are slaughtered shortly after birth. Some European countries export a percentage of their surplus male calves for veal production in other countries and a small percentage of male dairy calves are reared above veal age, for example in some Scandinavian countries.

Animal welfare problems associated with some methods of veal production include: transport and mixing of young calves from different dairy farms; abnormal nutrition (prolonged feeding of milk replacement liquid food, beyond what would be physiologically normal, and maintaining a low iron status to produce typical white veal meat); barren housing (close confinement using veal crates and tethering are now illegal across Europe).

The acceptable methods for euthanasia of calves are an overdose of general anaesthetic (such as barbiturates), captive bolt followed by an additional method, such as exsanguination, to ensure death (AVMA 2013) or gunshot (EFSA 2012).

When calves are killed soon after birth, their carcass is usually destroyed rather than used for meat consumption.

There have been initiatives to address the problem of unwanted bobby calves, such as the UK Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholder Forum. This forum, which ran from 2006 – 2013 and included non-governmental, industry, retailer and veterinary organisations, achieved improvements in the following three areas: (1) An increased uptake of male dairy calves into the beef chain in Great Britain; (2) A reduction in calves killed on farm (3) A reduction in live exports of calves for further fattening. Successful approaches included promoting markets for assured higher welfare rose veal, where calves are reared in group systems with adequate nutrition, and the use of sexed semen to reduce numbers of unwanted male calves.

Male layer strain chicks

Male layer chicks have no commercial value due to them not laying eggs and their slow growth meaning they are unsuited to economic meat production. Hatcheries in the EU kill around 330 million day-old-chicks a year.

Day-old male layer chicks are killed using either carbon dioxide gas or by maceration. The carcasses of gassed chicks may be used as animal feed, whereas there is limited use for macerated carcasses.

Leenstra et al (2011) have reviewed various ways that the problem of unwanted male layer chicks could be addressed, including looking in to the egg to determine sex, changing the hen (e.g. environmentally influencing the hens to produce fewer male eggs) and genetic modification (e.g. to make sex reversal of male embryos into female chickens possible). One of these methods – *in-ovo* sexing to allow destruction of male embryos - is currently being considered for practical, commercial use.

There have been recent attempts to legislate on this problem; in May 2016, for example, Germany voted against a proposed ban on the killing of day-old chicks for economic reasons (Osterbath 2016).

Males of dairy species other than cattle

As for bobby calves, many male dairy goat kids, and in some countries (e.g. Italy) buffalo calves, are often killed at birth. These animals could have an economic value if demand for meat from these species was stimulated amongst European consumers. Ethical acceptability of this solution would be contingent on the reared animals enjoying a good quality of life and a humane death.

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