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News Release

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ECONOMICS AND FARM ANIMAL WELFARE

The Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) today launched its Report on Economics and Farm Animal Welfare. The aim of this Report is to explore the relationships between economics and farm animal welfare, and to identify mechanisms by which economic drivers might be exploited to enhance farm animal welfare.

Professor Wathes, Chairman of FAWC, said: “In investigating our subject, we have found that issues in economics are just as complex as those in science. We recognise that political decisions about the welfare of farm animals have to account for economics – in its broadest sense – as well as sociological, technical and other factors.”

He continued: “The Report argues that economics can help us to understand the relationship between animal and human welfare. It considers both micro- and macro-economic questions about livestock farming and the quality of life of farm animals, i.e. those relating to profitability on the farm and trade, respectively.”

Professor Wathes concluded that: “FAWC’s advice is that Government has a crucial role to play in maintaining an acceptable standard of farm animal welfare. The quality of life of farm animals cannot be left to the free market because economic forces are powerful and vested interests many-fold. The Report argues strongly for the introduction of a ‘Welfare Stewardship Scheme’. This will ensure that the Government’s objectives for the welfare of farm animals match those of citizens, including many consumers and others in the food supply chain.”

The Report provides/assesses:

- an overview of economics (part II);
- drivers for decision-making at the farm level and how the financial environment of livestock farming has varied (part III).
- whether welfare improvements at farm level can be self rewarding through improved animal performance or whether they require to be incentivised by other external drivers (part IV);

- how the market currently rewards welfare initiatives, identifying the drivers and constraints in this process (part V);
- the policy instruments available for Government intervention if welfare is considered as a public good (part VI);
- international issues (part VII);
- decision making at farm level in order to identify the effects that economic pressures have had on welfare in the past (part VIII); and
- the most effective drivers to future animal welfare improvement with examples of successful models in current practice (part IX).

END

Notes for Editors

1. The Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) is an expert committee of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales providing independent, authoritative, impartial and timely advice on the welfare of farmed animals, including farmed animals on agricultural land, at market, in transit and at the place of killing; and on any legislative or other changes that might be considered necessary to improve standards of animal welfare. It also provides independent scientific support and advice as required by Article 20 of Council Regulation (EC) No.1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing.
2. The Committee took up much of the work of the Farm Animal Welfare Council when it was closed down in March 2011 as a result of the review of government 'arm's length bodies'.
3. Professor Christopher Wathes has been the Chairman of FAWC since January 2005. He is Professor of Animal Welfare at the Royal Veterinary College, University of London.
4. All FAWC members serve in a personal capacity and do not represent any organisation with which they may be associated.
5. Copies of FAWC publications are available from the FAWC Website. Approaches for interviews should be routed through the Secretariat.

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