Future of Farm Animal Husbandry
Necessary adjustments from a veterinarian point of view

More and more farm animal husbandry in Germany is publicly criticised. Aspects of consumer health protection, animal welfare and a considerate handling of the environment are cited against progressive intensification of animal husbandry.

Veterinary practitioners are closely connected with animal husbandry and its production processes. To a considerable extend they are responsible for animal health, efficient maintenance of animals and prevention of animal diseases and therefore contribute considerably to secure food production by taking into account animal welfare and economic efficiency.

Through their sound scientific education and the obligation for advanced training on a regular basis veterinarians are able to evaluate animal needs, health and well-being according to the actual state of science. In close cooperation with the livestock owners this professional expertise is a precondition for appropriate animal husbandry and its implementation. Nonetheless, veterinarians are not responsible for deficits in agricultural holdings/farms. Though in the context of livestock management veterinarians do have an advisory function, generally, the livestock owners are responsible for implementing the recommended measures.

Due to their ethical attitude towards their profession veterinarians are committed to both animal and human beings. Hence, the German Association of Veterinary Practitioners (bpt), representative for veterinary practitioners in Germany is consent to take part in the political discussion regarding the future of farm animal husbandry. As result of the broad discussion within the association bpt requires to put the following aspects into the focus of the social debate:

- **Farms sizes**
  From the professional point of view a restriction of farm-sizes cannot be supported. **Varying farm sizes and different types of animal husbandry require different concepts** to satisfy animal needs. During planning and approval procedures the requirements of these concepts regarding type of housing, feeder, water, aeration facilities etc. must be considered. Measures to guarantee bio-security and environment protection depend to a great extend on the form of agriculture and size of livestock and need to be professionally examined for approval.

- **Staff**
  In contrast to livestock sizes technical and vocational skills of staff are of vital importance for animal welfare. Introducing a “**Proof of Competence for Staff without Agricultural Training**” is an effective measure to avoid deficits. In cases of proven violations the "Proof of Competence" must be withdrawn or
further conditions must be added. Here the relevant veterinary authority in control of the farms is in charge.

- **Zoo-technical measures**
  Prophylactic medical interventions regarding the integrity of animals are generally rejected. The so far commonly accepted measures must be scientifically verified regarding benefits and necessities. If such a medical intervention is necessary according to veterinary indication, it must be carried out by a veterinarian **according to the guidelines of the "Veterinary Act"**. In all cases the gentlest methods possible under the conditions of daily practise must be chosen. This also means to carry out such medical interventions with the best possible anaesthetisation.

- **Animal husbandry systems**
  Animal husbandry systems must be organized according to scientific findings to make sure that animal needs are taken into consideration. It is advised to implement a **mandatory testing procedure for animal husbandry systems**.

- **Animal welfare indications**
  For an objective evaluation of "animal welfare" adequate **generally binding indicators for animal welfare**, which indicate a permanent impairment of the animals’ well-being at an early stage, must be further developed and applied on scientific basis. The parameters on animal health documented so far, like for instance a high number of diseases, a decline in performance, feedback on results from slaughterhouses (food retail chain information) etc., are important but not sufficient indications.

- **Veterinary livestock monitoring and farm visitation system**
  Registration, analysis and evaluation of relevant criteria for process liability and product quality in agricultural farms must be carried out area-wide, systematically and continuously. This should be done according to the **professionally and conceptually defined bpt guidelines regarding an integrated veterinary livestock monitoring system**.
  For the implementation of a veterinary livestock monitoring system integrated into the initial production it is crucial that the visiting intervals stated in the guidelines are not optional to the respective veterinarian and farmer, but will be mandatory either in the context of a quality management system or by law (see "Guidelines livestock monitoring", [www.tieraerzteverband.de](http://www.tieraerzteverband.de), column "In Focus").

- **Responsible handling of pharmaceutical products**
  Deficits in animal husbandry, hygiene and animal welfare must not be compensated by applying pharmaceutical products, in particular antimicrobial substances. On the other hand, animal welfare and responsibility for the fellow creature require an adequate therapy for sick animals.
Antibiotics may only be used after examination and diagnosis of a veterinarian and according to legal requirements. In cooperation with the legislative authorities a responsible handling of pharmaceutical products by using practical guidelines like the guideline for antimicrobial substances and the guideline for oral medication must be enhanced. Existing registration and monitoring systems for the circulation/distribution of pharmaceutical products must be further developed to gain better insights regarding origin and spread of antibiotic resistances. At the same time it must be considered that additional insights should be associated with this system and that no unnecessary bureaucracy is created for the veterinary practitioner.

- **Reducing application of antibiotics**
  Additionally to the integration of a veterinary livestock monitoring system into agricultural animal husbandry as one of the details of animal husbandry prophylactic vaccination of livestock should be enhanced. Thus, diseases can be prevented and consequently, the application of antibiotics can be reduced without endangering animal health and animal welfare. Quick diagnosis and early treatment improve chances of recovery, reduce duration of treatment and at the same time reduce application of antibiotics. Therefore, it is necessary to create legal terms under defined conditions for a specific post-mortem removal of organs for diagnostic purposes by veterinary practitioners.

- **Control of animal diseases**
  In the past the current strategy to control highly contagious animal diseases has led to heavy loss of animals, aligned with hardly manageable consequences for the complete line of industry and the society. Use of vaccination to prevent spread of diseases will limit loss of animals and lower costs. Therefore, it is important and necessary that the legislator includes vaccination into the control-strategy of highly contagious animal diseases. At the same time those responsible in political bodies and economic institutions have to create regulations to guarantee sales and trading of meat from animals vaccinated during such measures to control contagious animal diseases.