Public attitudes research

Professor Grahame Coleman, (University of Melbourne), has been successful in attracting funding under the auspices of the National Animal Welfare RD&E Strategy to carry out research on public attitudes to animal welfare.

The one year project “Monitoring public attitudes to inform animal welfare policy development”, (funded by Australian Meat Processor Corporation, Australian Pork Limited, Australian Wool Innovation and the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy - AAWS, through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry), will develop a community attitudes survey that will enable exploration and ongoing monitoring of public knowledge of livestock practices and of the impact of livestock farming, on animal welfare, health and behavior.

The public’s value and attitude shifts towards livestock animals and how or whether these translate into behaviour and the existence and role of opinion leaders in disseminating welfare information in the community will also be investigated.

This project will form the basis for regular monitoring of the community’s attitudes towards animal welfare and collaborators in the project are Assoc. Prof. Dominique Blache (University of Western Australia and Dr. Samia Toukhsati (Hon Research Fellow, The Ohio State University).

ISAE Conference 2013

Dr Jean Loup Rault and University of Melbourne PhD students Megan Verdon and Sally Sherwen have recently returned from Florianopolis, Brazil after attending the 47th Congress of the International Society of Applied Ethology conference - ‘Applied Ethology: understanding behaviour to improve livelihood’.

They met with renowned welfare researchers from around the world and discussed the latest research happening in the field. Megan presented her work on aggression in group housed sows, ‘Group-housed sows who engage in aggression after mixing have reduced injuries and gain more weight’ and Sally presented her study on the effect of visitors on zoo meerkats, ‘A multi-zoo study on the effect of manipulated visitor behaviour on zoo meerkats’.

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Jean-Loup was successful in being elected Secretary of ISAE from 2013 - 2017. But it wasn’t all work and no play, there was also some spare time to explore the beautiful beaches of Florianopolis and of course sample the famous Brazilian cocktail, Caipirinha.

While over in that wildlife hotspot of the world, Megan and Sally put their animal behaviour skills to the test and spent some time trekking the swamplands of the Pantanal in search of the elusive white-lipped peccary. They volunteered with field researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society of Brazil, helping collect data on peccary movement patterns, home range size and food preferences. Along the way they had some brilliant wildlife viewing of Brazilian Tapir, Giant anteaters, Mountain Lions, capuchin monkeys and the famous capybara.

Megan’s research is supported by the CRC for High Integrity Australian Pork and Sally’s work is supported by Zoos Victoria and the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy.

**ProHand® Dairy Cows delivered by NCDEA**

Following on from “train the trainer” sessions delivered by staff from the AWSC, The National Centre for Dairy Education Australia has commenced delivery of ProHand® Dairy Cows training.

Training has been conducted by Nathan Cox of TasTAFE at the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture in Burnie and by Beate Barnes of NCDEA Northern Victoria at a property near Nurmurkah.

The feedback from trainees was excellent, with participants particularly enjoying the content and ease of navigation through the program and the stimulating discussion generated by the session 2 review.

Further ProHand® training will be delivered as part of TasTAFE pre-employment programs and ProHand® has been scheduled for inclusion by a large dairying company on their training schedule for the remainder of 2013.

Currently, ProHand® Dairy has been conducted in Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia and a total of 103 trainees have undertaken the program.

The roll-out of ProHand® Dairy Cows has been supported by Dairy Australia’s large herd program.

ProHand® Dairy cows featured in a recent edition of the Age educational supplement and the article can be accessed here:

Publications - 2013

Refereed journal


Refereed conference


Theses

Ralph, C.R. (2013) Circulating plasma glucocorticoid concentrations did not consistently predict intracellular glucocorticoid concentrations or their effect on glucose metabolism in the pig (Sus scrofa) or the laying hen (Gallus gallus domesticus). The University of Melbourne.

ProHand® Pigs in US

Today in the United States there are more pigs being raised under contract production than ever. In a study completed by the USDA, it was reported that the total number of hogs raised under contract increased from five percent in 1992 to 67 percent in 2004 (USDA). However, little information is known about contract producers with regard to their attitudes, behaviours, gender, or previous swine production experience, to name a few characteristics.

Sara Crawford has recently completed her PhD at The Ohio State University which aimed to assess baseline stockperson/contract grower beliefs and attitudes toward grower-finisher pigs and assess the subsequent behaviours toward pigs as they influence pig fear responses, and to assess the efficacy of ProHand® Pigs stockperson training in modifying existing attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of stockperson toward pigs, with the ultimate goal of developing a version directed toward contract grower-finisher production settings. Sarah’s PhD dissertation can be found online at https://etd.ohiolink.edu/ap:10:0:NO:10:ACCESSION_NUM:osu1325216784
Success for students

PhD student Jo Coombe (supervised by Andrew Fisher, University of Melbourne Faculty of Vet Sci) is studying the effects of flexible feeding systems on the health and welfare of dairy cows.

At the recent Dairy Research Foundation Symposium at the University of Sydney, Jo won the Emerging Dairy Scientist Competition. Jo is pictured receiving her prize from Phillip Howard of Howard-Australia.

The John and Jenny Barnett Memorial Prize has been established by family and friends of John and Jenny Barnett and is awarded annually to a student undertaking a project in animal welfare at the University of Melbourne. This year’s winner was Trista Harvey who received her prize from Jenny’s brother Jim Forse at the recent Dean’s Honours and Awards Presentation. Trista’s project will investigate the relationships between human attitudes to enclosure design and the welfare of capuchin monkeys in zoos.

The University of Sydney John Barnett Memorial Prize for the best animal welfare science essay is presented annually to a third year student in the Bachelor of Animal and Veterinary Bioscience Degree, Faculty of Veterinary Science, The University of Sydney. This year’s winner, Naomi Bernecic (pictured on the right) wrote a thoughtful essay on improvements in the welfare of Atlantic salmon in aquaculture systems through advances in husbandry practices.

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