

# University curricula incorporate animal welfare

by Candace Pollock

Ohio State University educators believe stewardship of food animal production begins in the classroom, and they are taking a proactive approach to instill that responsibility in students.

Researchers from Ohio State's Department of Animal Sciences and College of Veterinary Medicine have collaborated on the development of animal welfare teaching guides — one of the first projects of its kind in the United States that incorporates scientifically based animal welfare topics into existing animal sciences curricula.

"Stewardship encompasses animal welfare, production efficiency, environmental concern and social awareness," says James Kinder, chairman of the animal sciences department. "The public and the food industry itself has become more aware of the responsibility of being a good steward of our food supply, and they demand that those in animal production be knowledgeable about those issues."

Jeanne Osborne, project assistant, adds, "Animal welfare and food production go hand in hand. Students need to be well-versed in welfare issues and appropriate welfare practices that will keep animal welfare in mind as they enter the food-production industry. As educators, it is our responsibility to provide them with that knowledge."

Nine teaching modules, ranging from animal ethics to stress impact to proper animal welfare techniques of farm and companion animals, are currently being developed and will be tested this fall. The modules are being created with help from Paul Hemsworth, director of the Animal Welfare Center in Melbourne, Australia. Hemsworth is renowned for his successful development and implementation of animal welfare handling on Australian farms.

"We are tapping into Paul's expertise to bring what he's done (in Australia) to the U.S.," Kinder says. "Animal welfare is a big concern with the public and needs to be dealt with in a proactive fashion." He adds that the heavy emphasis on the "science" in the teaching modules is to help distinguish animal welfare from animal rights.

"We need to make sure that the foundation of animal treatment is based in science and not just emotion," he says.

David Zartman, an Ohio State animal scientist and project scientist, says, "Animal rights specifies that animals are entitled to the same rights as humans in the condition that they are capable of living — to have

food, water, comfort, mobility and the absence of pain. Animal welfare says that animals will be given the opportunity to minimize their suffering, not because it's their right, but because it's good husbandry."

He adds that although the difference between the terms must be emphasized, educators should also be charged with helping to bridge the gap between a genuine concern for an animal's well-being and the

production line of which it has become a part.

"The purpose of the project is to make sure students are educated in a fashion so that they have a greater awareness for animal welfare issues and why it is important to society at large," Kinder says. "This is what our students, stakeholders and the public expect of us."



## New data can help farm employers

by Mary Lou Peter

Because of the sheer breadth of the land they work, farmers sometimes feel isolated. That isolation can extend to information about how a producer compares as an employer to others across the county or across the state.

"We've found that most [farmer] employers want to be fair and competitive when it comes to compensating their employees, and now we have a tool that can help them do that," says Kansas State University (K-State) economist Sarah Fogleman.

Fogleman, who is the K-State Research and Extension agricultural economist for southeast Kansas, worked with the Kansas Farm Management Association to survey 446 farm employees on 189 farms across the state last fall. What they found should help agricultural producers who employ workers (full-time, part-time or seasonal) at all skill levels.

The survey found that across skill levels, total average compensation for full-time employees ranged from \$20,871 to \$33,060 a year and averaged \$28,188. Total compensation included wages, and possibly such benefits as housing, a vehicle, profit-sharing and bonuses.

Skill levels were rated 1 to 5, with employees included in Skill Level 1 considered to have few skills and likely to be new to farming. Employees in Level 5 were highly skilled and had complete supervisory and decision-making authority.

"The most surprising and puzzling result is that compensation doesn't increase steadily as you climb through the competency levels," Fogleman says. "There is actually a drop off from what Level 4 [employees] are paid compared to Level 5. We don't know exactly why that is, but it may be a function of different factors. Many Level 5 employees are family members or part owners of the business."

Also, Level 5 employees had typically been employed much longer than workers at the lower skill levels, so their wages were not as subject to market pressure as were those who had recently changed jobs, she says.

The average hourly wage for full-time employees was \$8.36, and could range from \$7.01 to \$10.63 per hour.

Thirty-eight percent of all full-time employees surveyed received health insurance through their employers, 35% had housing provided and 37% had utilities provided. Fifty-six percent of all full-time employees received farm products, such as meat or produce, 21% had use of a vehicle, 11% were provided a retirement program, 4% were involved in an employer-sponsored profit-sharing plan and 38% received bonuses. The average work week for all full-time workers surveyed was 53 hours.

"Due to the important role that part-time employees play on many agricultural operations, we also surveyed part-time and seasonal workers," Fogleman says.

The average wage across competency levels for part-time employees was \$7.26 per hour but ranged from \$5.95 to \$10 per hour.

The average number of hours worked per week by part-time workers of all skill levels was 18.

Seasonal employees of all skill levels received an average hourly wage of \$7.84, with a range of \$6.73 to \$10 per hour.

Seasonal employees worked an average of 34 hours per week. They worked an average of 4.57 months per year for a particular farm or ranch.

As with part-time employees, seasonal employees' benefits were much fewer than full-time staff members' benefits.

For further information on the survey contact Fogleman at (620) 431-1530.

