



Building a new governmental authority based on public demands for improved animal welfare

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Background

Sweden has a long history of detailed and progressive legislation related to animal welfare for laboratory, farm and companion animals. Historically these issues have been the responsibility of the Veterinary Administration and later the Swedish Board of Agriculture (SBA). As a certain proportion of the public opinion felt that the animal welfare related issues were not given proper attention at the SBA, a political decision was recently made to separate animal housing, management and welfare from the SBA and create an independent Animal Welfare Agency. The new agency should also include a section for research animals.

The Animal Welfare Agency

This Agency, which was formally launched on January 1st 2004, is located in the small town of Skara in South-western Sweden. This is one of the most important farming regions in the country, and the town also houses parts of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, which will hopefully help provide the Agency with frontline expertise knowledge in the fields of animal husbandry, veterinary medicine and ethology. The government has commissioned the Agency to improve animal welfare by developing, enforcing and evaluating legislation. The agency should consider scientific evidence when writing new legislation, while most of the purely ethical considerations in relation to legislation will be made at the political level. However, the Agency will incorporate an external Animal Welfare Council, which will discuss ethical aspects in relation to existing or proposed legislature.

The Swedish Animal Welfare Agency has overall responsibility for all animal welfare in accordance with the Swedish Animal Welfare Act. Part of the spirit of the agency is expressed in our logo: two watchful, yellow cat eyes against a black background. It signifies supervision, watchfulness, attention, and an animal's perspective.

Almost one-third of the Swedish Animal Welfare Agency's budget is made up of research funds. Most of these go to research on alternatives to animal experiments, including methods that refine, reduce, or replace the use of laboratory animals.

The agency is also charged with strengthening the supervision of animal welfare in Sweden. We strive to obtain uniformity, legal certainty, and quality in the supervision of animal welfare. Through monitoring, agencies ensure that the law is obeyed. In Sweden it is the

country's municipalities and county administrative boards that act as monitory authorities at the regional and local levels. The task of the Swedish Animal Welfare Agency is to guide municipalities and county administrative boards in their work by providing advice, education, and regulations. The goal is for the Swedish Animal Welfare Act to be applied in the same way throughout Sweden. This task is taken care of by the monitoring and information division. Disseminating information about animal welfare to the public, the media, and other agencies is another important task for the Swedish Animal Welfare Agency. The most important channel is the Web site (www.djurskyddsmyndigheten.se), but the agency also distributes printed material, provides training, and maintains a front desk in order to give fast answers by phone.

Besides the monitoring and information division, the Swedish Animal Welfare Agency has a division that is responsible for pets, a third division handles issues surrounding laboratory animals, and a fourth (the largest) deals with agricultural animals, fur-bearing animals, and fish, as well as slaughter and animal transport. The fifth and final division is an administrative division that manages legal and financial issues as well as public records. All in all, the Agency employs approximately 35 persons, most of which are veterinarians, biologists and other types of animal scientists.

The new Agency must deal with a diversity of public expectations. Animal rights groups have high expectations regarding new and stricter legislation, for example related to fur animals, while some farmers fear that production aspects may be completely lost in discussions about improving welfare standards for farm animals. Our vision is that all animals in the service of human beings should live a good animal life and that the public should place their confidence in us as an advocate for animal welfare.