

Health monitoring and the issue of rehoming animals

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Microbiological quality assurance in laboratory animals aims at reducing the variation caused by uncontrolled infections by sampling random, healthy animals for examination on a routine basis in order to minimize the number of animals used in research. For animals such as rodents produced solely for research purposes such health monitoring is the rule, and animals are always produced under conditions dramatically reducing the risk of specific infections. However, the less animals are produced for research purposes and the more they are produced for other purposes the less is the availability of animals health monitored in this way. I.e. as a substantial number of pigs are produced only for research purposes it is possible to buy animals health monitored in the same way as rodents, while e.g. cattle are not health monitored with a research purpose in scope, and wild animals are not health monitored at all. On the other hand, being essential for the national and European economy farm animals are routinely health monitored and in other ways controlled from a production economy point of view, and such rules are from a legal and authority point of view in general much stricter than rules for health monitoring of more typical laboratory animal species. Also any movements and 'whereabouts' of farm animals are registered by the authorities in a way that would make the International Doping Agency's registration of bicycle riders look like the travel diary of a kindergarten child. Therefore, any other fate than killing farm animals after terminating experiments is fairly complicated, and as the number of farm animals killed for food purposes anyway outnumbers the number of farm animals used for research by a factor 10^4 it may also make less sense.