

Challenges in farm animal research: the protectionist's view

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The category of “farm animals” is not included in the statistical reports of the European Community. Therefore, an estimate of the number of farm animals used for scientific purposes cannot be given with certainty. However, in 2008, 166771 ungulates and several hundreds of thousands of birds were used in scientific experiments in the EC.

EU-wide polls have shown that a large majority of the public objects to animal experiments. The examples of public opposition to the use of pigs demonstrates this opposition to include farm animals, refuting the claim that the use of farm animals in experiments may be more acceptable since these animals are bred to be slaughtered, anyway.

From the point of view of animal protectionists, there are numerous problems of ethics and animal welfare involving experiments on farm animals. This includes the keeping of large farm animals under the conditions of experimental research; e.g. SPF facilities, confinement and lack of opportunities for social interactions and species-specific behaviour.

In addition to this several types of animal experiments using farm animals cannot be ethically justified e.g. those associated with gene manipulation with the aim of gene “pharming”, xenotransplantation, and optimization of farm animals to specific husbandry conditions. Equally unjustifiable are experiments for which alternatives exist as in education and training.