

136 of 153 DOCUMENTS

The Associated Press

April 6, 1986, Sunday, BC cycle

BYLINE: From AP Newsfeatures, By JIM DRINKARD, Associated Press Writer

SECTION: Washington Dateline

LENGTH: 1688 words

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

Officials are drafting new regulations to insure humane treatment of laboratory animals, with researchers and animal rights advocates looking over their shoulders. It's an effort to stake out a middle ground in an emotional issue.

After a cease-fire prompted by protests, Pentagon doctors are again shooting at pigs and goats to study how bullets and shrapnel affect human tissue.

At another government agency, scientists are inducing a condition much like Parkinson's disease in monkeys to try to learn more about how people get the debilitating illness and how to treat it.

In other laboratories, research animals are subjected to shocks, isolation, or drug dependence to gain insight into human behavior.

Such diverse scientific experiments and tests make up the broad spectrum of U.S. animal research. On some of the tests ride much of mankind's hope for progress against suffering and disease. Others hold the prospects for billions of dollars worth of current and future commercial products.

But much of the animal research is under fire, the subject of vehement debate over whether there is justification for the suffering or deaths of the animals that scientists contend hold the keys to knowledge.

Animal welfare advocates, who have accused researchers in some instances of running "concentration camps for animals," are stepping up pressure on the federal government to require humane care for laboratory animals.

They say many researchers have what Christine Stephens, the grande dame of animal welfare lobbyists, calls "a peculiar philosophy" based on the belief that animal suffering is less, or at least less important, than that of people.

Scientists counter that horror stories about the treatment of laboratory animals are the exception rather than the rule. They are concerned that emerging federal rules will tie their hands or price vital research out of reach.

"We certainly recognize there are some problems," says Melissa Brown of the Association of American Medical Colleges. "We just differ over the extent to which there are problems out there...Our feeling is that the research is beneficial, and it's helping mankind AND animals. That's the price we have to pay."

Both sides are closely watching developments in Washington, as officials translate into concrete regulations the provisions of a new law. It's designed to strengthen the 20-year-old Animal Welfare Act, which governs the treatment of laboratory animals.

"It's taken a terribly long time," Stephens says of the new provisions, which were included in 1985 farm legislation.

"But I think the changes will make a tremendous difference. This is a very important law."

The use of animals in laboratories is so diverse that no one has precise figures on how many creatures are sacrificed each year in the name of science.

Congress' Office of Technology Assessment estimates that 17 million to 22 million animals are used in U.S. scientific experiments and testing each year. Animal advocates put the figure far higher, at 70 million or more. Because the nation lacked a comprehensive mechanism to regulate such activities, the actual figure is anyone's guess.

What is certain is that the favorites of researchers are rats and mice; their annual use in laboratories numbers in the millions. Research rabbits, guinea pigs and hamsters total perhaps a half million each, the congressional researchers believe. Use of dogs and cats is substantially lower, and the number of primates is in the tens of thousands.

Animals are used in three basic ways: for research, ranging from investigations of cancer and AIDS to behavioral studies of aggression and addiction; for testing products like drugs and cosmetics before they are released for human use; and, to a much lesser extent, in education, particularly of medical and veterinary students.

Those who advocate strict limits and standards use occasional horror stories as ammunition, like a 1981 incident at Ohio State University. There, kittens in a laboratory were given identification tags on chains around their necks. As the kittens grew, the chains became embedded in the animals' flesh. The university settled the case in 1983 by paying a \$500 fine without admitting guilt.

Much criticism also was leveled at the University of Pennsylvania, where technicians were shown on videotapes casually bashing primates' heads to remove helmets glued on for a study of head injuries. The tapes had been pirated by an underground animal rights group, the Animal Liberation Front, and led last year to a \$4,000 fine against the university.

But those who use animals say most researchers are conscientious and don't abuse their charges.

"I'd say it's like any other business," says Jim Hansen, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the agency charged with enforcing the the Animal Welfare Act. "The vast majority of people do a good job."

[TEXT OMITTED FROM SOURCE] industry, stung by public criticism, learned that products can be tested through test-tube methods instead of using the traditional procedure _ squirting substances in rabbits' eyes to see whether they blister or blind the animals.

For most of its history, laboratory animal use has gone relatively unregulated in the United States.

Private groups have their own standards, and government agencies like the National Institutes of Health have policies governing research done under federal contracts.

But it was not until 1966 that Congress gave such standards the force of law, designating the USDA as the watchdog for treatment of warm-blooded animals in laboratories, breeding facilities, pet shops and zoos.

That law, the Animal Welfare Act, governs only the housekeeping of those who use animals. It specifies cage sizes, ventilation, sanitation and feeding requirements, but leaves decisions about whether to use animals, or how to use them, up to the scientists. As currently administered, it excludes rats and mice from protection.

"We're saying you can do anything you can think of to an animal in this country" so long as it is fed and kept in a clean cage, says Patricia Forkan of the Humane Society. Even those standards, she says, are poorly enforced.

The act has been amended three times. Animal advocates say last year's changes are the most significant yet

because, for the first time, they will require animal users to set up care committees that include one outside, "public" member with no ties to the institution.

The revisions also include a requirement that institutions provide for "the psychological well-being" of primates and for regular exercise for caged dogs _ both changes which worry researchers because of the expense of carrying them out.

"There are no scientific data which say any minimum exercise per day, or per week, is physiologically better," says **Frankie Trull**, director of the National Association for Biomedical Research. "You just sleep better at night because you think if exercise is good for you, it must be good for the dog."

She says scientists agree in principle with animal welfare groups about the need for adequate care. Mistreated animals, those under abnormal stress, make for bad research and dubious results, Trull says, and that is one reason research institutions have developed their own voluntary care guidelines.

"But does every rat have the right to its own house? What is the trade-off to the American public? If we lose animal research what do we lose in the process? It could put us 10 years farther away from an answer to juvenile diabetes."

Open houses held by some labs to explain to local animal activists the nature and value of their work have fallen on deaf ears, says Ms. Brown, of the American Association of Medical Colleges. At one Western school, a scientist spent an entire day with animal advocates explaining potential benefits of research there. "They were not willing to listen, and finally he called the meeting off in total frustration," Brown says.

Philosophy underlying the issue covers a broad spectrum, from those who have no qualms about wholesale animal use to those who accuse the rest of society of "species-ism" _ an offense they insist is akin to racism and sexism.

Just how much the new law will affect actual use may be known as early as June, when Agriculture Department officials hope to have a first draft of the new regulations. In the meantime there will be hearings and a public comment period.

Other new features of the law require scientists to be trained in animal care; for animals to receive anesthetics, tranquilizers and pain relievers where possible; for a new central information service to record experimental results and make them available to prevent needless duplication of animal experiments, and for annual inspections and stiffer fines for violators.

Hansen of the USDA says the changes represent a striking confluence of opinions among moderates on both sides of the issue but that the task of translating the law into regulations remains half the battle.

"It's a very emotional issue, too," he says. "I don't know who on this earth doesn't feel for an animal that's suffering."

How thorough enforcement can be remains a question. The Agriculture Department has just 450 veterinarians and technicians nationwide to keep an eye on the more than 6,000 institutions covered under the act. Those employees have many responsibilities, and spend only about 6 percent of their time on Animal Welfare Act enforcement, the department says.

Moderates on both sides agree that some animal experimentation is justified but should be conducted under rigorous supervision.

Writing in "Beyond the Laboratory Door," a 1985 book detailing reports of animal abuse and neglect, Dr. Samuel M. Peacock of Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia says it is a scientist's obligation to ask, 'Is this project and the publication really worth the eyes of 20 monkeys or the hearts of 10 dogs or the brains of 12 cats?' If the answer is 'yes,'

The Associated Press April 6, 1986, Sunday, BC cycle

then these animals should be treated as royalty in their brief stay in our laboratories."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

Copyright 1986 Associated Press
All Rights Reserved