

Animal Welfare and Bioethics in Curricula of Slovak Agricultural and Veterinary Higher Education Institutions

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Roots of the Slovak agricultural research and education could be found in literature of the 18th and 19th centuries (Matej Bel, Juraj Fándly, Samuel Tešedík). The beginning of agricultural vocational training in the Hungarian monarchy (part of which was at that time present-day Slovakia) is related to Samuel Tešedík (Tessedik, an Evangelist preacher with Slovak ancestry), who established in 1780 an agricultural school in Szarvas (town in the south-east Hungary with considerable Slovak minority), the first secondary school of its kind in Europe, that functioned until 1806. In 1871 was founded the first agricultural school at the territory of the present-day Slovakia, in Liptovský Hrádok. Its activities lasted till 1886. After the breakdown of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and formation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 there were no specialised agricultural or veterinary higher education institutions in Slovak part of the country. In 1941 at the Slovak Technical University in Bratislava was established the Department of Agricultural and Silvicultural Engineering. However, the autonomous agricultural and veterinary universities were founded only after the World War II. These are the Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra and the University of Veterinary Medicine in Košice.

The Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra was established in 1946. At present there are 2854 students attending the 5-year study program of the University. In an academic year 1999/2000 graduated 469 students. Teaching animal welfare and ethics of animal production in curricula of this university is closely related to research in field of applied ethology. It has a long tradition starting in early 70-ties of the 20th century (Novacký, 2001). Early activities in this field are documented for example by the proceedings of the 1st National Seminar on Ethology Applied to Zootechnics organized in Nitra in 1979 (Kovalčík, 1979; national meant at that time Czechoslovak), to which contributed several researchers from the University. A similarity with the 1st World Congress on Ethology Applied to Zootechnics organized one year earlier in Madrid, Spain (Garsi, 1978) is not coincidental. It is documenting the fact, that research on both institutions in Nitra dealing with applied ethology, Institute of Animal Production and Slovak Agricultural University, always tried to be in touch with the rest of the Europe, although at the time of the communist regime an international collaboration outside the Eastern block was complicated. However, there was a contact mainly through the scientific literature. The first remarks about the farm animal welfare issues on national scientific meetings appeared in Czechoslovakia in late eighties of the 20th century, reflecting international development in this field (Košťál 1987, 1989). After the breakdown of the communist regime in 1989 “the iron curtain” disappeared. That meant also easier cooperation and collaboration in field of science and education without previous limitations. This development can be documented by the proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium on Ethology in Animal Production in Nitra in 1991. At this meeting several welfare related contributions were delivered by foreign and by Slovak researchers. We can mention one of the main invited lectures the Ethics and ethology of farm animals presented by J. Hurnik from Canada, who by coincidence graduated from the Nitra Agricultural University (Hurnik, 1991) or Improving animal welfare by new housing systems presented by J. Metz from the Netherlands (Metz, 1991). Farm animal welfare became gradually an integral part of the applied ethology related courses at the Slovak Agricultural University (Debrečeni, 1996). There are at present three courses covering topics related to ethics of animal production and welfare delivered at the Slovak Agricultural University. These are Ethology, Ethology of Farm Animals and Technology of Animal Production.

The University of Veterinary Medicine in Košice was founded in 1949. Three years later, in 1952, it was changed into the Veterinary Faculty and became the part of the Agricultural University in Nitra. In 1969 its independent status was re-established. At present there are 842 students attending the 6-year study program of the University and in academic year 1999/2000 graduated 102 students. Animal welfare issues have been incorporated into the syllabus of the Animal Hygiene course in early

nineties of the last century. Teaching staff contacted Prof. Broom and Prof. Webster in the UK, as well as other specialists in field of welfare, transport and slaughter. As a part of the seminar work teaching staff elaborated special protocols for on farm monitoring of animal welfare. In these protocols are taken into consideration existing Slovak legislation and European legislation, as a part of the accession process of the Slovak Republic into the European Union. One of the programs having large impact on veterinary education in field of welfare is the program within the Tempus scheme the Development and Delivery of Courses on European Veterinary Legislation (IB JEP-14 387/99). Partners in this project are University of Veterinary Medicine, Košice, Ministry of Agriculture, the State Veterinary Administration of the Slovak Republic, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Ghent, Belgium, the Veterinary Medicine Faculty, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain, the Veterinary School, University of Bristol and Meat Hygiene Service, Tauton, both United Kingdom. One out of the eight modules of this program is concentrated at Animal Welfare. Besides the animal welfare part of the Animal Hygiene courses in the academic year 2001/2002 has been opened the new course dedicated directly to the Veterinary Bioethics.

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