Teaching Animal Bioethics in Agricultural Higher Education in Poland
Renata Urban – Chmiel¹, Tadeusz Kuczynski²
¹Agricultural University of Lublin, renatachmiel@go2.pl
²University of Zielona Gora, kuczyn@box43.gnet.pl

The problem of following animal bioethics rules in veterinary practice is extremely important but also very difficult. Sometimes it’s very difficult to make a judgement of technical aspects of using animals as for example: patients (sick animals), laboratory animals etc.

The issue deserves thorough discussion not only at Agricultural Universities, although it is of particular concern for veterinarians and animal scientists, farmers but also should be addressed to larger public.

In Poland the courses on “Ethology and animal welfare” are currently being carried out at four Agricultural Universities (Wroclaw, Poznan, Olsztyn, Warszawa) involving some bioethical problems in animals. At the University of Agriculture in Lublin (the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine) this course is going to start in October, 2002.

Only three Agricultural Universities (Wroclaw, Poznan, Lublin) answered to Aristoteles questionnaires, which was sent to universities in Poland. But on the basis of the information contained in the questionnaires, obtained from Agricultural Universities in Poznan, Wroclaw and Lublin, we were able to prepare the National Summary contained in Aristoteles Programme - AFANet. Each of these courses is or will be carried out as a graduate programme. One of them is conducted as an optional course at the Agriculture University in Wroclaw, in the Department of Genetics and Animal Breeding with the total number of students – 30. Three of them have been carried out as compulsory courses with total number of students – 340:
60 – 80 at the Agriculture University in Poznan,
150 – at the Agriculture University of Wroclaw, Faculty of Vet, Medicine,
120 – at the Agriculture University of Lublin, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine.

In the courses totally 7 academic teachers (scientific workers) and 3 other teachers are engaged.
In Wroclaw (the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Department of Veterinary Prevention and Immunology) – 2 teachers one vet and one with agricultural background.
In Wroclaw (Dept. of Genetics and Animal Breeding) – 1 teacher with agricultural background.
In Poznan – 5 teachers with agricultural background.
In Lublin (the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine) – 2 teachers with veterinary medicine background.

All three institutions (Poznan, Wroclaw, Lublin) are ready to exchange course material.

Among the keywords used to describe the contents the most important in our programmes in Poland concern:
Farming  4
Companion animals  3
Animal in experiment  2
Animal in use  2
Animal rights  2
Animal in sport  1
Human relationship  1

The mean % of time dedicated or planned to dedicate to animal welfare and ethics are compared with:.
Respect for life use of animals : 32,5%
Respect for animal welfare : 17,5%
Respect for biodiversity, environment : 15%
Ethics theory : 6,25%
Welfare assessment : 5%
Respect for human health, rights : 1%. 
Two institutions: Agricultural University of Poznan, Department of Animal Breeding and Genetics and Agriculture University of Wroclaw, Department of Veterinary Prevention and Immunology are already engaged in some in international cooperation. Agricultural University of Lublin (Faculty of Veterinary Medicine) tries to get in cooperation with some scientific centres in EU countries and also with some chosen Animal Welfare Centres in the USA and Canada. It will be very helpful for us, because we could get some knowledge about technical preparation of courses involved with animal bioethics.

Poland is one of the countries on its way to European Community (EC), so the law regulations on animal welfare and bioethics have been completely changed according to suitable EC requirements. The main regulatory act is the Act of President RP from 21 August, 1997. In this act the animal is characterised as a subject and that it requires a humanitarian treatment. There are many regulation acts concerning pets and farming animals, animals in zoos, wild animals, animals used in experiments and other groups of animals. Most of law acts on animal welfare, housing, transportation, environment were contained in European Community Council Directives which now are effective in Poland too. We see an important role of the consumers association and some pro – animal organisations. They are opened on cooperation with us – the academic teachers. They are very helpful in organizing the meetings, preparation of some important material which are helpful in the teaching process. And these groups have important influence on the shape of some issues in law acts concerning animals. For example, at present a spectacular action concerned with permission for transportation of horses from Poland to other countries in Europe is being carried out. The law animal acts in the recent period tried to follow the law regulations of the European Community countries rather closely. Completely different agricultural aspect of Polish agriculture however, made it impossible to precisely relate the problems in Poland with the ones faced in the other countries. The most typical in Polish agriculture are small private farms, where the animals are treated as a part of a family, so the relationship between human and animal is different than in EC countries. The changes in the structure of agriculture and housing systems have introduced many changes in relations between humans and animals. Large production systems have been developed and it is them to whom the changes in law acts should mostly concern.

The history of Poland affects human – animal relations. Strong and successful struggle of Polish farmers to keep their farm under communist government made the link between animals and farmers stronger than probably anywhere else in Europe. Poland is not the only country in Europe and around the world where human use animal for various reasons. The role of the animals in people life can not to be overestimated.

The good practices in teaching animal bioethics is the improvement in the relations between human and animal in everyday life, also between veterinarians and animals as patients where animal is like a subject not like a thing. The main reason behind animal ethics teaching is continuous growth of society and veterinarians in particular conscience on animal welfare issues. But in these programmes we face some difficulties. Probably the most important one is that the animal bioethics in agricultural education in Poland is a new problem. We haven’t got an unified teaching programme for every Agricultural University. There are not any trainings and courses for scientific teachers who carry out the course on animal bioethics. There are too few teaching and scientific congresses on animal ethics and welfare. And we have a big obstacles with the development of inter – university exchange programmes. The main of them is that we do not have in Poland an access to many teaching European Programmes. We have big problems with getting money for scientific work and study, because the significant decreasing of money for science and teaching is observed at Polish universities. So we can mostly count on subsidies obtained from European programmes. Because we are not yet an EC country we could get only small part of the money which is devoted for development of teaching programmes and methods in European programmes.