

Brussels, 10 November 2008

Commission launches "Farmland": The fun way for kids to learn about animal welfare

In an effort to raise awareness among children about the importance of treating farmed animals in a respectful and humane way, the European Commission launched today "Farmland," the European children's website on animal welfare. "Farmland" is an interactive and informative online computer game targeting children aged between 9 and 12, which also aims to help tomorrow's consumers be in a position to make informed choices about the food they will be buying. The Commission is also developing an online teacher's toolbox containing exercises that can be used in class to help children better understand the issue of animal welfare. Some Member States have already expressed interest in the project.

Health Commissioner, Androulla Vassiliou, said: "Information and communication play an important role in helping us to understand the value of animals in our society. We have a duty to inform our children about the origin and production of food and to raise awareness about animals and how they should be handled and treated. With 'Farmland' we believe we achieve these objectives in a way that is also interesting and entertaining for our children."

The origins of Farmland

The necessity to inform European children about animal welfare became evident during the first serious avian flu outbreaks in 2004. Children in Europe watched on television the images of the culling of poultry, which was necessary to prevent the disease from spreading further. Many children, in particular those of primary-school ages, reacted to these images by sending letters and drawings to the Commission asking it to take action to protect the animals.

These were the origins of "Farmland," which attempts to explain to children that although we farm, transport and slaughter animals for our needs, we also have rules and policies in place guaranteeing that the animals are treated humanely. The five freedoms, developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, were the basis on which "Farmland" was developed.

The content

"Farmland" consists of an illustrative part with information on the needs of farmed animals. In the different computer games, the children can apply the underlying welfare concepts they have read about. These games concern farming, animal transport and the supermarket and aim to reproduce the different moments in the animals' life along the food production chain.

The children play the role of the farmer or that of the supermarket shopper. The former aims to introduce the concept of animal welfare to children, and the latter how to recognise the origin of animal products, which will help them make informed choices as future consumers.

The website currently exists in nine EU languages – English, French, German, Greek, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Polish and Swedish. The language selection was based on geographic criteria in order to cover Europe as widely as possible – from North to South and from West to East. If there is demand, "Farmland" will be further developed in all EU languages.

Teachers' toolbox

"Farmland" is a valuable teaching tool that can be used both at home and at school. In order to assist teachers to use "Farmland" effectively, the Commission is also creating an online teachers' toolbox. It contains a set of exercises, which can be used in class to help children better grasp the issue of animal welfare and retain its key concepts.

The context

"Farmland" is being launched within the framework of the European Veterinary Week (November 10-16), which is organised for the first time by the Commission and the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE).

Some Member States and international organisations have already expressed concrete interest to be officially associated with "Farmland" and promote it in their territories. The Commission is confident that more partners will soon join the efforts to actively promote this project.

To enter "Farmland" please visit:

<http://www.farmland-thegame.eu/>