

EUROPEAN UNION SETS THE PACE: VIRTUAL ANIMAL WELFARE ON 'FARMLAND'

A new online video game released by the European Commission (EC) shows children what animal welfare can mean on a farm. Interactive and informative, "Farmland" targets children throughout the EU aged between 9 and 12 and also aims to help tomorrow's consumers make informed choices about the food they will be buying.



[Play the game...](#)

Farmland is a virtual farm where pigs, laying hens, chickens, cows and calves are reared in an animal welfare friendly way. European farmers Berenice, Amandine, Paolo, Miguel, Bertrand and Marc work hard every day to run the farm, bearing in mind that animals are sentient beings.

Throughout the game children are encouraged to think about the welfare of animals in the context of food production and consumption. This is a global concept.

From an Australian perspective, the negative aspects of keeping laying hens in battery cages are pointed out and we learn that “from the end of 2011 battery cages will no longer be used in the European Union because they are bad for animal welfare”

The EU’s superior requirements for housing pigs are explained and in a visual Power Point the EU concedes that “they are working hard to find better solutions” for “mum and her piglets” than the present ubiquitous farrowing crate.

The game teaches that to be a good farmer, the player needs to show total respect for the animal and follow the principles of the Five Freedoms:

- Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- Freedom to express normal behaviour
- Freedom from fear and distress

If in doubt as to what the animals need, the virtual farmer can click on "The life of animals" button and learn about the requirements for each species.

Although some of the harsher realities of animal farming are not shown, the video game provides young people with a valuable insight into the production of meat, eggs and milk in a medium which will appeal to them. At the same time it promotes animal sentience and consumer awareness.

In its supermarket section the player is requested to identify the provenance of each animal product, highlighting the importance of labeling, especially on free range eggs.

For example, farmer Miguel takes care of laying hens and warns the player about how important it is to respect their biological rhythm. He also advises that they need to move around freely, stretch their wings, eat and drink at regular intervals.

Players cannot shop until they have successfully taken care of their animals on the farm.

Compassion in World Farming (UK) has advised the EU Directorate General for Health and Consumers, responsible for the online game's development, about animal welfare standards and helped to shape the contents of the forthcoming teachers' material.

An online teacher's toolbox is being developed containing exercises that can be used in class to help children better understand the issue of animal welfare. It will be released later this year.

The website is translated in nine European languages, so also useful in Australia for teachers of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) – including German, Greek, Spanish, French and Italian. See: <http://www.farmland-thegame.eu/>