

World Association for Transport Animal Welfare and Studies (TAWS)



Common ground: moving forward with animals

TAWS/TAA/BVA workshop held 15 April 2004, Silsoe Research Institute, UK

Workshop report

(draft of 18 April 2004)

Background, objectives and participants

The World Association for Transport Animal Welfare and Studies (TAWS) held its 2004 workshop on Thursday 15 April 2004. It was generously and efficiently hosted by the Silsoe Research Institute at the wonderful historical location of Wrest Park near Bedford.

The title of the workshop 'Common ground: moving forward with animals' reflected the aim of identifying points of common interest among organisations and individuals working in the fields of agriculture, veterinary science, animal welfare, intermediate transport and socio-economic development in order to move the agenda forward. TAWS aims to stimulate greater collaboration and information sharing for the benefit of all the relevant stakeholders, including the work animals themselves.

The workshop brought together about forty people concerned with working animals and their welfare, including agriculturalists, research staff, veterinarians, representatives of the major charities as well as interested supporters and students. It provided a stimulating and conducive environment to exchange ideas and information, and propose new initiatives and actions in this important field. This event was held in collaboration with the Overseas Group of the British Veterinary Association and the Tropical Agricultural Association.

Introduction and keynote address

Roger Connan (TAWS President) welcomed participants and Paul Starkey (Workshop facilitator) introduced the workshop programme and methodology. Lord Soulsby of Swaffham Prior gave the keynote address, in which he stressed the importance of working animals in the world and the need to find common ground. Animal power could play a vital role in the struggle to reduce world poverty, although governments and aid agencies often neglected its importance. In Africa, where malaria and HIV/AIDS are particularly serious, an integrated approach is needed, with more investment in health and economic development. In this context, the theme of 'common ground: moving forward with animals' was highly appropriate.

Animal power for crop production: new tillage or no tillage?

Dr Andy Whitmore of Silsoe Research Institute made a presentation prepared by his colleague Jim Ellis Jones on 'Animal power for crop production: new tillage or no tillage?' This emphasised the benefits of, and constraints to, animal powered ploughing and reduced tillage systems, with emphasis on African case histories. Constraints to animal powered tillage included shortage of animal feed at the start of the ploughing season, decreased labour availability and degrading soils. Reduced tillage systems could improve soil structure, but weed control could be a problem unless integrated control measures are applied. If reduced

tillage systems become more common, the work animals will still be important for transport. At present 95% of the world's transgenic crops are grown in the Americas, and the debate is still open as to whether they will prove to be important in African farming systems.

Moving forward with animal power for transport

Paul Starkey, of Animal Traction Development and the University of Reading, introduced the diversity of transport animals, with a rapid photographic world tour, showing many striking images. He provided an historical perspective, emphasising the importance of the private sector and contrasting long-term trends with the inevitable shorter horizons of poor farmers, politicians and development projects. In Africa, the use of ox carts and donkey carts is currently increasing, having been stimulated by public sector initiatives (including credit) in the second half of the twentieth century. Most support services to animal power are now provided by the small-scale private sector, although governments may assist the development of a 'critical mass' of both users and support services in areas of on-going introduction. Animal welfare charities can assist with training, networking and information exchange, and assisting governments to develop strategies that enable animal power to develop efficiently and humanely. Appropriate regulation and enforcement require collaboration between animal owners, users, local associations and authorities, and these processes should be encouraged and supported.

Collaborating with other organisations: practical and ethical considerations

John Smales, Chief Executive of the International League for the Protection of Horses (ILPH) gave a lively and thought provoking presentation on 'Working with other animal welfare organisations: practical and ethical considerations'. The public wanted to see the many charities concerned with equines and animal welfare working together. The charities had to find ways in which such collaboration would be mutually beneficial, given their different ethical background and supporters. Useful collaboration was desirable and possible, provided there was mutual trust and respect, and clear guidelines were prepared in advance defining the limits of joint actions, responsibilities and stating the agreed outputs and publicity. Personal contacts, candid negotiations and transparency of purposes were particularly important.

Efficient yoking and harnessing of animals

Jörg Bremond, of ZADI (German Information Centre on Biological Diversity) and the German Working Group on Animal Traction gave a presentation on German harnesses for oxen. Using diagrams and photographs he explained the functions and advantages of the three-pad collar harness. Heinrich Steinmetz (and others) did not like to use yokes attached to the withers or head, as this constrained the animals' natural movements. They developed a three-collar-pad system of harnessing, where the main traction points lie on the shoulders, while allowing the animals to move freely. Although there are now not many owners of oxen in Germany, this appropriate technology may prove of value in other countries.

Dr Drew Conroy of the University of New Hampshire gave a presentation on different types of ox yokes. This was based on his experience in USA, where he has trained oxen for many years, and participated in many pulling contests, where yokes are expected to allow animals to provide maximum tractive power. He explained the advantages of the New England neck yoke, where the low hitch point ensures the yoke maintains a large surface of contact with the neck, while the bows allow the shoulders to push efficiently. Individual teams should have yokes made for them, and they need to be replaced as the animals grow. Drew Conroy has subsequently come to appreciate the positive features of alternative yoking systems including the head yoke used in Quebec and the simple low-cost withers yoke he has seen being used by

farmers in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. While the principles of yoking are always the same, the final choice of design will depend on many local considerations including comfort, convenience, costs and culture.

Terry Davis of the Harness Development Agency talked about the principles of donkey harnessing, giving examples of well-designed collars, breast bands and saddles. Terry Davis is organising a 'Donkeys in Work' weekend event on July 24 and 25th 2004 at weekend at Acton Scott Museum, at Church Stretton (Shropshire, UK). Details of this will be circulated and made available on the TAWS website.

Cozette Griffin-Kremer of the Centre d'Histoire des Techniques in France provided background to working cattle in Europe and the current interest in historical and cultural aspects as well as present-day usages. Cozette Griffin-Kremer and colleagues in France and elsewhere in Europe are hoping to arrange a workshop and other networking events to expand share and expand knowledge in this field.

Practical demonstrations and posters

Following lunch and networking exchanges, there were practical demonstrations using donkeys provided by Carl Boyde, the Chairman of TAWS. After a brief display of donkey ploughing, attention switched to the specialised hitch cart developed by Charles Pinney of Carthorse Machinery. This has a 3-point linkage and a petrol motor to power auxiliary equipment such as manure spreaders. One advantage of this system is that the animals only have to pull the equipment and not power other moving parts from a ground wheel. Costing in the region of £4000-5000 (GBP), the equipment is intended primarily for the European market, although there may be applications in other parts of the world.

During the workshop there were demonstrations of equipment for farriers. TAWS, SPANA and the Overseas Group of the British Veterinary Association (BVA) provided information on their work. There were several posters relating to rural transport, animal welfare and simple animal-drawn carts. A range of publications, CDs, DVDs videos and other resource materials were on display (some available free and some for purchase).

Group discussions and concrete suggestions

At the start of the afternoon session, Tony Stevens of TAWS and BVA gave a progress report relating to opportunities for students. At the 2003 TAWS workshop, several recommendations had been made to improve information exchange relating to prospects for overseas work for veterinary students. Tony Stevens explained how the various objectives had been achieved and links created between veterinary colleges and the TAWS/BVA scheme to promote opportunities to get young people involved.

This example illustrated one objective of the afternoon's discussion groups. This was to decide on a few simple actions that could realistically be undertaken that would encourage collaboration and make a difference to animal welfare. Three groups were formed, to discuss issues relating to harnessing, transport and regulation and collaboration between agencies.

The interagency collaboration group agreed on the importance of collaboration and some guidelines relating to this. ILPH volunteered to prepare and circulate a draft position paper for discussion as a way of moving forward. The harnessing group agreed on ways to improve information exchange relating to yokes and harnessing systems, and they will develop a web-resource on the subject to be included within the TAWS website. The transport and welfare

regulation group decided that simply cataloguing existing welfare legislation would not achieve significant progress, in many countries the legislation was largely historic, and was not being actively used. However, it would be extremely valuable if examples of successful applications and good practices could be shared. A networking approach would be needed to track down and share such examples. TAWS would endeavour to take a lead in this, in association with other charities and organisations.

Workshop evaluation

Before the workshop closed, participants completed anonymous evaluation forms. Responses were generally positive, with 83% of 286 assessments made being 'good' or 'very good'. The highest evaluation score was for the overall impression of the workshop. The most popular presentations were collaboration between charities, ox yokes and animal power for transport. Participants said they had learned about yoking systems, animal welfare charities, the importance of inter-agency collaboration, the diversity of animal traction and international linkages. Participants thought the best aspects of the workshop were networking, strengthening collaboration and the presentation of international experience. While appreciating the workshop atmosphere and methodology, some suggestions were made for improvements and future workshops. The full results of the workshop evaluation have been posted on the TAWS website.

Workshop proceedings, outputs and further information

TAWS will publish the papers presented and a summary of the discussions on its website as soon as possible. Several of the papers presented and reports are already available on the TAWS website - www.taws.org. Later in 2004, a printed volume of proceedings will be published. Further information is available at the TAWS website, and further developments and progress will be reported there. The TAWS Secretariat can be contacted at:

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