

## Chapter 8

# Animal welfare and ethics in organic agriculture

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## Introduction

Animal welfare is a question of the animal's quality of life (Sandøe 1999) and is an area of increasing concern in Western society. In the European Union (EU), animals were officially recognised as sentient beings in 1997, in the Treaty of Amsterdam (EUR-Lex 2003), with England, Austria and Norway being examples of countries implementing new and stricter animal welfare legislation. In the United States of America (USA), the large fast-food chains have joined efforts with the supermarkets to establish some animal welfare regulations for their suppliers (Brown 2004).

In organic farming, there is a tradition of animal welfare concerns (Niggli and Lockeretz 1996, Boehncke 1997, Roderick and Hovi 1999). The organic movement frequently identifies animal welfare as an important goal, but welfare is also an area where strong criticism regarding organic animal production has been expressed. While some have argued that organic animal husbandry represents the best possible welfare in contemporary farming, representatives from conventional agriculture have often been critical of the welfare of organic animals. Consumers have appreciated the organic way of raising animals (although this is not always reflected in the sales records of organic products, Magnusson *et al.* 2001), and animal welfare is regularly used as a positive marketing argument for organic animal products (Harper and Henson 2001).

The question has to be asked, what are the reasons for these diverging opinions regarding animal welfare in organic production systems? This issue will be examined in this chapter, evaluating the underlying values in organic farming and whether there is an animal welfare problem in organic farming.

## Animal welfare and ethics

Although there is general agreement that animals should have a good quality of life, there is no agreement as to what this means in practice. A good example to illustrate this is the two dog owners who both claim they provide their pets with the best possible quality of life (Fraser *et al.* 1997). The first makes sure to give the dog nutritious food, extra vitamins and regular coat trimming and always keeps the dog leashed to avoid it getting run over by a car, eating something harmful or running away. The other dog owner is less concerned about a balanced diet or a well-trimmed coat. During long hikes, the dog runs loose and can play in the dirt and may occasionally find and eat rotten meat scraps. This owner wants the dog unleashed since this