

Ethical consumerism

Most people are now aware of what a **carbon footprint** is and why reducing it is important for protecting the environment and the humans, animals and plants living in it.

There are many practical steps we can take to reduce our impact on the environment, for example, by reducing air travel, by not leaving on the television standby light or by changing to energy-efficient light bulbs.

But what about our **animal welfare footprint?** (our impact on animals and their welfare).

In our everyday lives, we all affect animals – either directly or indirectly – in different ways. The decisions we make and the way we behave can make a real difference to the potential suffering of animals. This includes things like providing for all the needs of our pets, not being cruel to animals and reducing our impact on wildlife (e.g. through responsible litter disposal). It also includes the choices we make as consumers about our health, the food we eat, the clothes we wear and where we get our pets from.

More and more people are concerned about this and are looking for ways to reduce any negative impact they may have on animals – whether on the farm, in the laboratory or in the wild. To calculate your animal welfare footprint, visit:

www.animalwelfarefootprint.com

People are changing and so is the law. A new law, the Animal Welfare Act, was passed in 2006 and came into force in 2007. It places a duty of care on anyone who owns or is responsible for an animal – on a permanent or temporary basis – to treat those animals humanely and provide for their physical and behavioural needs.

Businesses are also recognising public concern and have started to include animal welfare in their **ethical policies**. These policies set out the company's standards on issues such as child labour, the environment, the sourcing of food products from animals, and the use of animals in research and testing, where relevant.

Ethical investment in companies with good ethical policies is also a fast-growing area. Shoppers are more aware of the origin of the goods they buy and the production methods involved, and many are switching to ethical products (those that do the least damage). This has been described as **ethical consumerism** and is worth a staggering £32.2 billion a year in the UK.*

The products and services we choose to buy as consumers can also make a huge difference to the welfare of animals. Some higher-welfare options include free-range eggs or chicken, fake fur and cosmetic products that have not been tested on animals.

The RSPCA Good Business Awards celebrate and acknowledge companies in the UK's cosmetics, fashion and food industries that strive to improve animal welfare. For more information see: **www.rspcagoodbusinessawards.com**

*Source: *The Ethical Consumerism Report 2007* – The Co-operative Bank

