

## CHAPTER 8

# Animal welfare

Animal welfare has always concerned sheep producers given that the cornerstone of animal agriculture is good husbandry, including the provision of the right quality and quantity of feed, managing reproduction to ensure good ewe and lamb performance, good handling practices and protecting sheep from disease, predators and extremes of climate. The objective of the first seven chapters of this book is to provide advice on protecting and promoting animal welfare through appropriate nutrition, disease control, reproductive management and genetic improvement. However, animal welfare requires some discussion in its own right because consumers generally do not think in terms of feed, disease control, reproductive management, stockmanship or good husbandry, but in terms of what they believe to be good welfare for the animals whose products they, or others, may consume.

### **Animal welfare and quality standards**

The wellbeing of farm animals now concerns a large proportion of the general population and can no longer be regarded as of concern only to extremists. Members of the public want animal products, but they also want assurance that the animals from which those products were derived were fit and happy. Increasingly, consumers see animal welfare as a quality characteristic and markets are looking at ways of measuring it and passing this information on to consumers. If welfare standards do not meet consumer expectations, markets can be lost. Consumers and citizens want assurance that animals had a life that was worth living (a good life) and a good death.

### **What is animal welfare?**

‘The welfare of an animal is its state as regards its attempts to cope with its environment’ (Broom). Approaches to animal welfare can consider animal feelings (mental state), animal bodies (their biological functioning) and animal nature (natural conditions and behaviour). Good welfare includes both fitness and sense of wellbeing and goes beyond preventing unnecessary pain and suffering. Animals have essential needs that must be met to enable individuals to maintain their health and happiness. The ‘five freedoms’ have been proposed to evaluate and safeguard animal welfare.