

ANIMAL WELFARE ACT

HISTORY



The Laboratory Animal Welfare Act, now known as the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), was created in 1966 to regulate the use of certain animals in research in the United States. It remains the only federal law designed to cover animals used by breeders, dealers, exhibitors, and researchers.

1966

The Laboratory Animal Welfare Act set minimal standards for the care, housing, sale, and transport of dogs, cats, primates, rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, and other animals held on the premises of animal dealers or laboratories. The Act also required the licensing of dog and cat dealers and research facilities and the identification of dogs and cats to prevent their theft.

1970

The Laboratory Animal Welfare Act became the Animal Welfare Act of 1970 and extended coverage to all species of warm-blooded 'laboratory animals' as designated by the Secretary of Agriculture. The amendments required the licensing of all animal dealers. They also added the requirement for the "appropriate use of anesthetic, analgesic, or tranquilizing drugs." Animals sold as pets (except in pet stores) and those used in exhibition also became protected.

1972

The Secretary of Agriculture initiated regulations that specifically excluded birds, mice, rats, horses, and farmed animals from the definition of 'animal.' Until this time, these species had not been regulated as the Secretary of Agriculture had not designated them as 'animals.' This new regulation went further by specifically excluding the animals under definition of the term 'animal.'

1976

The Act was further amended to bring research institutions into the same category as exhibitors and dealers with respect to the imposition of fines for violations. Previously, research facilities were subject to a cease and desist order, which they would have to violate before a fine could be imposed. These amendments also made government research facilities comply with the standards set forth in the Act for private institutions. The Act was also amended to prohibit interstate transport of animals (excluding birds) for fighting.

1985

The passage of the Food Security Act of 1985 contained an amendment entitled the "Improved Standards for Laboratory Animals Act." This amendment strengthened AWA standards for laboratory animal care, increased enforcement of the Act, mandated training for those who handle animals, and created Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees at each institution using regulated animals. These committees oversee animal care at the institution and examine animal use, assuring that alternatives are considered in experiments that cause pain or suffering. In addition, the 1985 amendments required the "exercise of dogs" and a physical environment that "promotes the psychological well-being of primates."

1990

The Act was amended to define a minimum holding period of five days for animals held in shelters that were to be sold to research facilities. The amendment also established more stringent record keeping requirements for dealers who obtain animals from shelters and other random sources.

2002

Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) proposes an amendment to the Farm Bill to exclude "birds, mice of the genus *Mus*, and rats of the genus *Rattus*, bred for use in research" from the AWA definition of the term 'animal.' Despite on-going investigations at several prestigious research institutions regarding inadequate care and negligent deaths of numerous animals used in laboratories, Helms' amendment was accepted in the final version of the Farm Bill agreed to in conference committee. The Farm Bill also contained a provision to make it illegal to transport birds for fighting. President Bush signed the Farm Bill into law on May 13.

2004

June 4, 2004 - USDA publishes a Final Rule in the Federal Register stating that it is amending the AWA regulations to reflect the 2002 Farm Bill Amendment to the Act's definition of the term 'animal,' thereby excluding "birds, rats of the genus *Rattus*, and mice of the genus *Mus*, bred for use in research" from its AWA Regulations. USDA also publishes an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rule-making in the Federal Register and requests comments on various issues regarding regulations for birds, rats, and mice not excluded by the 2002 AWA Amendment.

July 21, 2004 - USDA extends comment period until November 1, 2004.

2006

March 7, 2006 - In response to petition filed by AAVS, USDA officially announced that genetically engineered and cloned animals should not be denied AWA protection.

The AWA can be made more effective and well managed with support from the scientific community, the animal protection community, and the citizens of the United States. We will continue our campaign for the inclusion of birds, mice, and rats, and all vertebrates. We hope for your support in doing so.

Learn more about the Animal Welfare Act at aavs.org.