

EDUCATION

Schools



ACTION STATIONS

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WHAT'S UP, DOC?

Contemplating a career in medicine? The Austin Hospital throws open its doors from 10am to 3pm this Saturday, 145 Studley Road, Heidelberg. Phone: 9496 6671.

LONG WAY TO THE TOP

Clinton Walker talks pop music and culture at La Trobe University's Bundoora campus on Thursday from 4 to 6pm. Room 330, social sciences building.

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Email events to jrgumont@theage.com.au

Animal rights in classroom clash

Farmers protest but a British kit is being adapted for local school curriculums, reports **Adrienne Jones.**

AFTER 20 years' lobbying internationally for farm animals, Carole de Fraga is no stranger to the polemic of the animal welfare debate.

She shouldn't be surprised then that her organisation's proposal to highlight animal welfare issues in the classroom has provoked a heated response from farmers' groups.

Ms de Fraga is the Oceania representative of the British-based Compassion in World Farming, and its educational arm, the Compassion in World Farming Trust.

She is developing an educational resource that the trust hopes to pilot in Australian schools next year, inviting educators to take up the cudgels for farm animals.

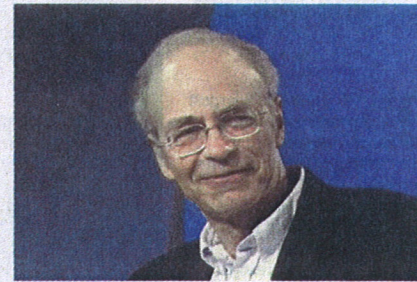
With a \$20,000 grant from the Sydney-based philanthropic animal welfare group Voiceless, the trust has adapted some of its British educational materials into an Australian kit to be offered to upper primary and lower secondary classes at 1000 schools in Victoria and Queensland.

The pilot kit includes a 20-minute video, *Farm Animals and Us*, which deals with animal intelligence, animal capacity for feeling, intensive and free-range farming, selective breeding, consumer ethics, and a supplementary guide for teachers on intensive and alternative farming methods in the production of eggs, milk and meat.

Its rationale is to raise student awareness of animal



Carole de Fraga and Peter Singer believe schools should teach compassion for farm animals. PICTURE: ERIN SLATTERY



sensitivity, the ethics of intensive and alternative farming systems, and individual consumer choice.

The embryonic Australian project raised hackles, with the National Farmers Federation calling on Australian schools and state education departments "to ensure students are presented with balanced, factual information about animal welfare on farms".

The group said Australian parents had "a right to be horrified" if their children were given school lessons on animal welfare "which are in fact a thinly veiled campaign to put kids off eating meat, eggs and dairy products".

Ms de Fraga rejects claims

that the project promotes "veganism", or that it is propaganda for the trust's cause. It should be viewed, she says, as resource material for teachers to introduce students to a critical assessment of the issues.

"What we're looking at is teaching them to reason, to recognise the consequences of the simple process of buying something at the supermarket, for example, and how cumulatively that can affect animal welfare," she says. "The key word is compassion. We want children to develop a more compassionate attitude towards farm animals and their environment and the world."

Ms de Fraga says the trust is not against farming but does

favour more moderate alternatives to intensive farming.

"What we want to achieve is the most normal life possible for farm animals. Hens need to be able to stretch their wings, pigs need to be able to move around and mix with other pigs, and sows need to be able to nurture their own piglets. That's what we're trying to bring about, believing that consumers are able to influence that."

Australian philosopher Peter Singer has also defended the project. "It is a good thing for schools to introduce students to some of the ethical issues raised by our choice of foods,"

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PETER SINGER

he says. "Compassion in World Farming is a highly respected, moderate organisation that has been a leader in achieving major changes in Europe, including new regulations phasing out cages for hens and individual stalls for calves and pigs."

The material in the Australian pilot kit has been used for some years in schools in Britain and Ireland. Where taught, it is integrated in mainstream subjects. It is also used in adapted

forms in other countries, including the Netherlands, South Africa and Austria. The trust's CEO in London, Joyce D'Silva, says the material has been "widely praised as interesting and balanced" by many teachers.

Ms D'Silva told the *Farmers Guardian* in Britain: "I also object to the CIWF trust being labelled 'animal liberationists'. Our mission statement is to promote global understanding of the sentience and needs of farm animals and the impact of technological, farming and trade practices on animal welfare, the environment and human wellbeing."

One of the founders of Voiceless, Brian Sherman, says education programs should give young people the opportunity to think critically about animal welfare issues and participate in the political processes that influence society.

"Children have a natural empathy and curiosity about animals. Voiceless believes the CIWF education program will foster respect and compassion, so that as adults they will advocate a more humane society," he says.

Queensland educational consultant Cynthia Burnett, who is working on the project with Ms de Fraga and two other teachers, says the resource will fill a gap in the school curriculum on farm animal welfare, but will be prepared in such a way that teachers who want to use it can incorporate it into subjects in the curriculum.

www.ciwf.org.uk/education/index.html