Case 10: Putting Animals Out to Pasture

Currently there are more than 100,000 primates in public, private, and government research facilities across the United States. These animals are being used for biomedical, clinical, and behavioral research studies across various disciplines. Many of these primates have been bred and born in captivity and have spent their entire lives living in research labs. Having been born in captivity, most of these animals have strong bonds with their human caretakers/researchers, and have never experienced sunlight, rain, or basic intraspecies socialization.

Traditionally, once animals have no more value as research specimens, they are humanely euthanized. Currently, euthanizing is considered a “best practice”; however, animal rights activists (and some researchers) argue that these animals, primates in particular, should instead be sent to a retirement sanctuary.

After two years of searching for a suitable retirement sanctuary for Bush, one of their primates, researchers at Princeton University were lucky enough to find one. He is now living out his days at an annual cost to the University of $2,500. While $2,500 is not an exorbitant amount, euthanizing would be more cost effective and the money saved could go towards other research, such as cancer trials.

Some researchers have other reasons to oppose retirement sanctuaries. The United States Department of Agriculture does not require animal sanctuaries to register with them, so there is little if any oversight of the living conditions. For this reason, adoption by the right persons might seem to be a better option than retirement sanctuaries. But there is no system in place for monitoring those conditions either.

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