

Why animals matter in achieving “The Future We Want”

The Rio+20 outcome document proposes the elaboration of a set of Sustainable Development Goals that will contribute to sustainably managing the world’s increasing resource use within the context of dwindling resource availability and prioritizes the eradication of poverty and hunger as a matter of urgency. *The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) believes that the introduction of animal welfare as an integral part of sustainable development is important, as global adherence to animal welfare principles will have significant positive impacts for poverty eradication and economic development, food security, public health, climate change and the preservation of biodiversity.*

Animals matter to poverty eradication and economic development

- Over 1 billion of the world’s poorest people depend on animals for jobs, food, income, transport, social status or cultural identification, as well as financial security¹. In other words, their animals are their main productive asset. Good animal welfare, including animal health, can improve survival; reduce costs; and increase profits, enhancing the productivity of that asset. As such, one could conclude that animal welfare is an important means of reducing poverty and safeguarding livelihoods.
- Some of the world’s poorest and most disaster-vulnerable communities are also those who are most reliant on livestock, poultry and working animals for their survival. Integrating animal welfare in disaster resilience and emergency planning will aid in preventing unnecessary suffering of those unwilling to leave their animals during disasters and will significantly enhance post-disaster recovery and economic regeneration efforts.
- Animal welfare is increasingly important in the trade of animal produce, not least because it can provide an advantage in terms of access to markets. Meeting good standards of animal welfare ‘from farm to fork’ can form part of a strategy to add value to animal-based food products and provide a stable source of income for both large and small-scale producers.

What is animal welfare?

Animal welfare refers to the physical and psychological wellbeing of an animal. The welfare of an animal can be described as good or high if the individual is fit, healthy, free from suffering and in a positive state of wellbeing.

Animals matter to food security

- A major factor in the failure to achieve food and nutrition security to date has been the lack of coordination and balance between animal and plant food production on a local, national and international scale. Globally, 53% of all oil crops (soybeans, palm oil and rapeseed) and 38% of all cereals (mainly wheat, maize and some rice) are used for livestock feed. Globally, livestock contribute an average of 16% of food energy (kcal) while requiring over 30% of all landmass.
- The production of increasing volumes of animal feed for industrial production has meant conversion of large areas of land and forest to livestock feed production, leading to displacement of farmers and communities. With prevailing food insecurity, especially in developing countries, concerns over the diversion of grain and protein for humans to feed for animals is growing.²

¹ World Bank (2009). *Minding the Stock: Bringing Public Policy to Bear on Livestock Sector Development*.

² <http://www.oxfam.org/en/grow/policy/food-transformation>; Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur

http://www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/officialreports/20120306_nutrition_en.pdf; and http://www.unep.org/pdf/foodcrisis_lores.pdf

Animals matter to climate change

- When considering the entire food chain, meat production accounts for 18-25% of all greenhouse gas emissions³. If the growth in intensive livestock production is left unchecked, it is predicted to account for 70% of the sustainable level of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050⁴.
- Livestock production also indirectly increases CO² concentrations in the atmosphere as large forest and grassland areas are replaced by croplands to grow animal feed crops. Forests and grasslands sequester carbon and play an important role in balancing emissions with absorption.

Animals matter to public health

- Around 60% of all human diseases and around 75% of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic⁵, meaning transmitted by animals to humans. In least developed countries, it is estimated that 20% of human sickness and death was due to zoonosis or diseases that recently jumped species from animals to people⁶. Animal health and human health are inextricably connected. The risk of zoonotic diseases (such as Salmonella, E. coli and Campylobacter as well as Avian and Swine flu) and food borne diseases is growing as farming methods have become more intensive and breeding and feeding approaches are increasingly designed to increase production rather than further animal health.
- Similarly, there are widespread concerns that the widespread use of non-therapeutic antibiotics in intensive livestock production systems is a significant contributing factor to the emergence of antibiotic resistant microbes.

Animals matter to biodiversity

- Biodiversity is integral to human and animal wellbeing. Biodiversity is reduced as a result of the increasing use of intensive livestock production systems which lead to ecosystem overexploitation and a decreasing availability of land for natural ecosystems and native habitats for animals.
- Biodiversity is also threatened by increasing pollution of the oceans, primarily in the form of marine debris, which affects marine animal life as well as the livelihood of the fishing communities that depend on them. Marine debris is a serious environmental, conservation, human health and economic issue, as well as a significant global animal welfare issue that requires urgent action⁷.

WSPA calls for all processes following up on Rio+20:

- ✓ To acknowledge that animals matter and that animal welfare is an important element of sustainable development and that adherence to animal welfare principles will lead to positive impacts for poverty eradication, economic development, food security, public health, climate change and biodiversity
- ✓ To reflect animal welfare and its several aspects in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

For further information please contact Ms Naiara Costa – phone: +1 646 783 2227 – email: ncosta@wspa-international.org – www.wspa-international.org

³ United Nations Environment Programme (2011), *Keeping track*, www.unep.org/geo/pdfs/Keeping_Track.pdf (accessed 12 November 2012)

⁴ Pelletier, N., & Tyedmers, P. (2010), Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA 107(43), 18371-18374

⁵ Taylor et al., (2001); Woolhouse et al., (2005)

⁶ Grace et al. (2011a)

⁷ Butterworth, A., Clegg, I., Bass, C. (2012). *Untangled – Marine debris: a global picture of the impact on animal welfare and of animal-focused solutions*. London: World Society for the Protection of Animals.