

Animals: helping us achieve the Future We Want



At the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), we work towards the urgent international recognition of animal welfare as an essential element of sustainable development. Global adherence to animal welfare principles will have significant positive impacts on poverty eradication, food security, public health, climate change and the preservation of biodiversity. Simply put, helping animals helps people.

Animals matter to people

Over 1 billion of the world's poor depend on animals for jobs, food, income, transport, social status and cultural identification. Good welfare practices improve animal survival, reduce production costs and increase profits, and so enhance the productivity of the poor's only productive asset and help eradicate poverty.

As the world's poorest people are the most vulnerable to disasters, it is also vital to integrate animal welfare into disaster resilience and emergency planning. This helps to prevent the unnecessary suffering of livestock and people and significantly enhances post-disaster recovery.

Animals matter to sustainable development

Animal wellbeing impacts on the most pressing issues of our time. In just one key example, livestock is crucial to food security. Unfortunately, our collective response to the growing demand for animal protein has been the expansion of low-welfare intensive livestock production and farming practices. Choosing this unsustainable path has led to a number of unintended consequences affecting:

- **global food security**, as grains are diverted from people to livestock
- **greenhouse gas emissions**, as forests and pastures are replaced by arable land for livestock feed production
- the occurrence and global costs of **zoonotic diseases**, such as *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, *Campylobacter* and avian and swine flu
- **biodiversity**, as natural ecosystems and native animal habitats are destroyed and what remains is overexploited.

Animal welfare offers answers

Making animal welfare a standard element for consideration in development areas such as disaster preparedness, wildlife protection, marine and dog management, and sustainable agriculture – for example by promoting sustainable livestock production that comprises animal welfare principles – represents an alternate and proven approach to achieving the Future We Want: one with food security, social stability, environmental sustainability and equitable economic growth.

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 to express natural behavior, free from suffering and in a positive state of wellbeing.



The Future We Want is possible

To achieve it, the United Nations and all its Member States must:

- **acknowledge** that animals matter; 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, food security, public health, climate change and biodiversity
- **reflect** that acknowledgement by integrating animal welfare into the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

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Animal welfare: key to delivering human health



Animals matter to human health

The World Health Organization (WHO) asserts that around 60 per cent of all diseases affecting people and around 75 per cent of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic.² Bad animal welfare in livestock production systems is increasing the risk of zoonotic diseases occurring, and increasing the associated global health costs. For instance, in the US, annual medical costs associated with food-borne illnesses (*Salmonella*, *Campylobacteriosis* and *E. coli*) exceed USD 4 billion.³

In addition, there are increasing concerns that the widespread non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in intensive livestock production is contributing to the emergence of antibiotic resistant microbes. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) states: "Intensive animal production with high densities of animals is a starting place for many significant health issues and has been known to trigger the emergence of antimicrobial resistance."⁴

Animal welfare protects our health

Good animal welfare, leading to healthier animals, will produce better quality livestock products, while reducing the risk of disease transfer from animals to people through the handling or consumption of those products.

Communities affected by disaster are more susceptible to the risk of disease. Protecting animals during disasters and including animals in disaster preparedness and resilience planning will reduce post-disaster suffering.

Rabies is another health threat in which higher animal welfare is proven to produce better outcomes for people. The WHO estimates that rabies kills more than 55,000 people every year.⁵ Traditional methods for dealing with rabies outbreaks involve the large-scale inhumane culling of dogs; this does not work. Our WHO-endorsed approach shows that mass dog vaccination is the only effective and sustainable response to rabies and, over time, is cheaper than culling.⁶

Animal health and human health are inextricably connected. The risk of zoonotic¹ and food-borne disease has grown as farming methods have become more globalized and industrial farming practices – which often have profound negative animal welfare consequences – bring new challenges for disease control. It is clear that real improvements to human health can be achieved through the systematic integration of animal welfare principles into livestock production systems, disease control measures and disaster preparedness and resilience planning.

For a future with better health for all

The inclusion of animal welfare principles in livestock production, disease control and disaster preparedness will have significant positive outcomes for our health.

To achieve this, the United Nations and UN Member States must:

- **include** specific targets/indicators seeking a reduction in the occurrence of zoonotic diseases – including reference to the role of animal welfare – in the Sustainable Development Goals
- **acknowledge** the impact of poor welfare farming on animal health, and of bad animal health on human health
- **mitigate** these impacts by including animal welfare principles in the development of agricultural and livestock policies
- **reduce** the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock production to limit the risk of anti-microbial resistance in people
- **include** animals in disaster preparedness planning and policies to ensure an effective post-disaster response to human health issues
- **cease** the inhumane culling of dogs and adopt canine vaccination programmes to respond to rabies and potentially contribute to its worldwide elimination.

1 Diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans

2 WHO. (n.d.). *Managing zoonotic public health at the human-animal-ecosystem interface*. Retrieved June 7, 2013, from <http://www.who.int/zoonoses/en/>

3 Batz, M. D., Hoffman, S., & Morris Jr., J. G. (2011). *Ranking the Risks: The 10 Pathogen-Food Combinations with the Greatest Burden on Public Health*. Florida: University of Florida Emerging Pathogens Institute.

4 FAO. (2013). *Edible insects: Future prospects for food and feed security* (p. 65). Forestry Paper 171. Rome: FAO.

5 WHO (2004). *WHO expert consultation on rabies: first report*. Geneva: WHO.

Retrieved June 7, 2013 from <http://www.who.int/rabies/ExpertConsultationOnRabies.pdf>

6 WSPA (2013). *For a rabies-free future: The urgent economic case for mass dog vaccination* (p. 5). London: WSPA.

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