

The World Veterinary Association and animal welfare

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Summary

The World Veterinary Association, as the global representative of the veterinary profession, recognises the global influences on animal welfare and the changing role of the veterinarian in response to the changing attitudes of the human population. While urban populations are now dictating animal welfare standards, many practices still have a cultural and even religious basis. Veterinarians recognise these influences, but base their recommendations for animal welfare on scientifically justified practices. Veterinarians work not only for urban clients with their companion animals, but also very importantly with rural clients who provide the source of animal-based foodstuffs and goods sought by an increasingly demanding human population. The controversial areas of intensive animal production and the transportation that is required to move large numbers of animals around the world require veterinary supervision to ensure that animal welfare is preserved. The development of animal welfare standards is an ongoing process, with the major international effort being led by the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Keywords

Animal welfare – Veterinarian – Veterinary profession – World Organisation for Animal Health – World Veterinary Association.

The World Veterinary Association

The World Veterinary Association (WVA) represents the veterinary profession at the global level. While there are many national, regional and specialist veterinary associations and organisations, there is only one true global representative of the whole veterinary profession.

The WVA was founded in 1863 and restructured in 1959 and then again in 1997. Its Secretariat is based in Copenhagen, Denmark, but its Council members and member associations come from around the world.

The WVA speaks and develops policies on behalf of veterinarians throughout the world. It has collaboration agreements with international organisations such as the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the International Federation of

Animal Health. The views of the WVA are formed following consultation with its members and expert organisations. Further information is available on the WVA website (<http://www.worldvet.org>).

Veterinary associations and animal welfare

Many veterinary associations have actively promoted animal welfare to their members and their stakeholders. A number of international, regional, national and specialist associations have animal welfare policies and regularly include animal welfare presentations in their conference programmes and in continuing education programmes for their members. An encouraging feature is the collaboration of veterinary associations with animal welfare organisations and other stakeholders to present significant conferences on animal welfare, especially in developing countries. These activities represent the most positive

actions that professional veterinary associations can involve themselves in to promote good animal welfare. The flow-on effect is to increase awareness of animal welfare issues along with the competence of individual veterinarians and their enthusiasm to improve animal welfare for their patients, their clients and for society.

Animal welfare and the veterinarian

Members of the veterinary profession have a wide range of expertise and skills that make veterinarians unique in their understanding of animal behaviour and animal welfare. Veterinarians have the pragmatism to examine and assess the welfare of animals in their environment and to make recommendations to improve welfare where that is required.

During their undergraduate training, veterinary students receive tuition in anatomy and physiology, animal behaviour, nutrition, animal health, diseases and medicine. Their understanding of animal husbandry adds to their ability to assess the conditions in which animals are kept. Veterinarians are highly skilled at problem solving, so veterinary graduates are able to assess the circumstances of an animal's situation and then to prescribe remedial measures to enhance its welfare where that is needed.

Although veterinary undergraduate training covers aspects of animal welfare, a higher profile for animal welfare matters needs to be given in veterinary curricula. In the trade of animals and animal products, international veterinary certification increasingly includes elements of animal welfare. Veterinarians need to be sufficiently qualified in the fields of animal welfare science and ethics, complemented by continuous post-graduate professional development courses, to be able to meet the demands of compliance with animal welfare requirements during the 'stable-to-table' process for products of animal origin, and to ensure effective enforcement of the relevant standards. While animal welfare has been taught in veterinary schools around the world, there are many areas where the necessary technical resources were not available. The World Society for the Protection of Animals took the initiative and developed a syllabus for animal welfare teaching, 'Concepts in Animal Welfare' (7), as a resource to be used in veterinary undergraduate training.

When veterinarians graduate, they submit to an ethical code of professional conduct that includes a commitment to 'have regard for their special duty towards animal welfare and to alleviate animal suffering'. Veterinarians must promote a standard of care that ensures that the needs of animals are met by both the veterinarians and the other people responsible for the care of the animals.

Even before there was wider recognition of animal welfare as a discipline, veterinarians had been promoting good practice indirectly in their advice to animal owners. Veterinarians had been concentrating on the management and health of animals so that animals were kept in good health and, in the case of production animals, were highly productive. There is no doubting the positive correlation between good management and good animal health on the one hand, and good animal welfare on the other. Much of what is now becoming documented in animal welfare standards is the advice that veterinarians have long given their clients. This is being supplemented by a new science, the science of animal welfare. Veterinarians have made and continue to make a major contribution to these standards.

Farm animal welfare

There is a critical relationship between animal health and animal welfare. The provision of animal health care, the prevention (through immunisation and quarantine, etc.) and treatment of diseases, as well as the culling (killing) of animals for disease control purposes, all have serious and direct welfare implications.

Areas of farm management that relate to animal welfare are as follows:

- a) Provision of living conditions that fulfil the needs of the animals for basic biological functioning (growth, rate of reproduction, etc.) and for physical and thermal comfort. This includes unlimited access to drinking water, the provision of food through management of the natural grazing and the provision of licks or feed supplements where and when needed. In some instances shelter from the heat (or cold) may be necessary for some animals.
- b) Skilful implementation of certain procedures used by the livestock owner, such as de-horning, castration, immunisations or means of identification (the application of brands and ear tags, etc.) so as to limit pain, fear, discomfort or stress. Here the proper construction of pens (lairages, yard facilities) and chutes (races) to prevent physical injury to animals plays an important role, as do the maintenance and proper functioning of equipment and instruments (such as syringes and ear tag applicators, etc.).
- c) Good and common-sense stock handling, performed by trained and competent staff.
- d) Early identification of diseased animals, immunisation against animal diseases and proper treatment based on correct diagnoses in consultation with the herd (farm) veterinarian.

There are global differences in animal welfare practices that are based on cultural and religious perspectives and beliefs. The veterinary profession recognises and respects these

differences but bases its recommendations and practices on the science of animal welfare. Veterinarians will continue to promote animal welfare based on the evidence of sound science.

The transportation of animals, be it by land, sea or air, poses particular welfare issues that are addressed at various levels around the globe. Recent events relevant to this subject include the OIE Global Conference on Animal Welfare (1) (held in Paris, France, in February 2004) and the signature of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals during International Transport (2), which increases the requirements for the protection of transported animals in Europe.

The OIE's initiative to organise the first global conference on animal welfare, involving all stakeholders, proved to be very successful and placed animal welfare firmly on the agenda of the veterinary profession. The key role of the profession (government veterinary services, private veterinarians, para-veterinary professionals) in animal welfare was clearly identified, and the conference emphasised the need to provide and strengthen the support and resources needed to accomplish the tasks and challenges that veterinarians face.

The OIE has established standards that will be complemented with more that are currently being developed. The *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (6) provides for an ethical approach for all certification, including that related to animal welfare. It also makes recommendations for transport, the slaughter of animals for human consumption, and the killing of animals for disease control purposes. While other guidelines such as the Live Animals Regulations (4) promulgated by the International Air Transport Association also exist, the OIE is setting the global standard. Implicit in the role of animal welfare certification are the members of the veterinary profession and their associated para-professionals.

Other new international requirements (based on European Union proposals) will, *inter alia*, relate to the following:

- the certification by a veterinarian of the fitness of animals to travel, e.g. certification that attests that there are no sick or injured animals, and no pregnant females for whom 90% or more of the expected gestation period has already passed
- the authorisation of transport vehicles and recording of journey data for the transport of animals
- a competent authority in each country to issue authorisations of transport vehicles and keep a register of these authorisations
- the re-authorisation of long-distance vehicles every five years

- vehicle design, e.g. vehicles that are equipped with temperature monitoring systems and waterers
- condition of vehicles
- stocking densities on vehicles (or ships or aircraft)
- limiting the duration of journeys (in future, in the case of long-distance land transport for all species: a maximum nine hours travelling followed by a minimum of 12 hours rest. The sequence may be repeated. No staging point is required. Animals rest within the vehicle. The driver has to stop for 12 hours after nine hours driving)
- definition of the length (duration) of a journey as the entire transport operation from start to final destination, including intermediate points
- regular rest and feeding periods
- the responsibilities and training of operators and drivers, including compulsory training for animal handlers at livestock markets.

Abattoir slaughter of animals

Killing animals is the most brutal act in the relationship between human beings and domestic animals. Legislative requirements for slaughtering practices aim to minimise the pain and suffering of animals and to ensure that slaughter is humane through the use of properly approved methods to stun and kill animals, based on scientific knowledge and practical experience.

The following animal welfare issues need to be addressed:

- stress reduction and minimisation of fear
- handling and restraint of the animal prior to stunning
- use and maintenance of race, stunning pen and stunning equipment
- stunning efficacy and accuracy
- use of qualified/trained and competent slaughter personnel
- bleeding procedures and their duration.

Societal views of animal welfare

As societies around the world have become increasingly urbanised, their views on the keeping of animals have changed. Many urban dwellers are now several generations removed from their rural ancestors. In the rapidly developing nations of the world, this distance of city

dwellers from their rural background can be expected to change attitudes even more rapidly, if the current rate of transition to modern lifestyles in these countries is any indication of what may happen in future.

Many urban dwellers now keep household animals for companionship and treat them as members of the family. They accord these animals high values and expect all domesticated animals to be similarly pampered. Urban populations have largely forgotten the realities of farming and the impact of nature. Their attitudes to the welfare of animals, and the choices they make as consumers when purchasing and using food and other animal products, are dictated by their own understanding and expectations for animal welfare.

The increasing affluence of many urban populations can cause people to put greater emphasis on animal welfare. Urban dwellers no longer need to pursue simply the cheapest possible food products, but seek various additional 'quality' characteristics (including assurances of food safety, origin and environmental provenance), of which a good standard of animal welfare is one. However, consumers ability to purchase products on the basis of animal welfare is limited by their own discretionary budget, and financial considerations still limit the numbers of people who can actually exercise their desire to purchase on an animal welfare basis alone.

In recent years measures to control the spread of animal diseases like avian influenza, classical swine fever, bovine spongiform encephalopathy and foot and mouth disease have resulted in the slaughter of millions of animals. This has led to very intensive debates, both political and professional, on the scientific basis and ethics of such actions.

Animal welfare standards are not defined at an international level except in Conventions by the Council of Europe and some multilateral agreements. Current World Trade Organization (WTO) provisions take little account of animal welfare; the prevailing view is that the WTO's trade policies would not allow countries to ban imports on animal welfare grounds even though poor welfare standards may be associated with poor health. However, this is yet to be tested under the WTO dispute settlement process. Nevertheless, the conclusions of the WTO Ministerial meeting in Doha in 2001 placed non-trade concerns, including animal welfare, firmly on the agenda for future WTO agricultural negotiations.

Today it is recognised that certain provisions of care, as encompassed in the 'five freedoms and provisions' (3), are essential to welfare, and every practical effort should be made to achieve them. They are:

- freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition, by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour

- freedom from discomfort, by providing a suitable environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area

- freedom from pain, injury and disease, by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment

- freedom to express normal behaviour, by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind

- freedom from fear and distress, by ensuring conditions that avoid mental suffering.

Implementation of animal welfare standards will require the involvement of the veterinary community and of other key stakeholders in industry and non-governmental organisations, who may have little knowledge of animal welfare science but who are keenly interested in being actively involved in the subject. Veterinarians have a special and legitimate role to play in animal welfare because this involves the relationship between animals and human beings. Veterinarians are in the best position to offer a balanced view between ethical social demands and scientific knowledge.

The relationship between veterinarians and animal owners

The veterinary profession has a very strong sector devoted to the care of companion animals, which is the sector of greatest prominence in the urban setting. These veterinarians are much like the family doctor when they look after the animals of the household. They care for the health and welfare of companion animals within the constraints of the family budget. They help to ensure that the welfare of these animals is kept within acceptable limits, both for the animal and for the community around it.

Another sector of the veterinary profession works with domesticated animals that are farmed for their meat and other products. Here, veterinarians are working with producers who are constrained by having to operate a successful business in an increasingly competitive market. Despite all the promotion of the products of organic and free-range farming, the reality is that most consumers still buy on the basis of 'lowest price'. Over the last 50 or 60 years, this market pressure has caused farming to develop towards economies of scale that enable farmers to remain financially viable and to meet consumer demand.

While many countries have the ability to produce sufficient food for themselves or are in a position to import sufficient

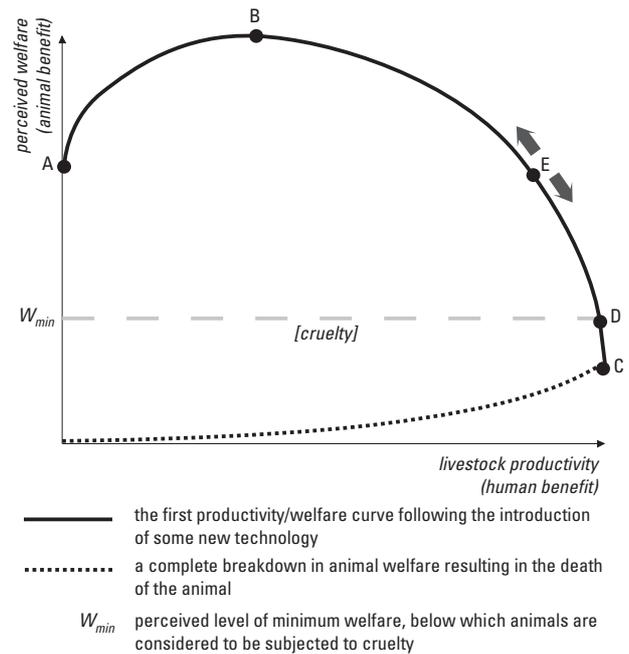
food, there is a global deficit of food production, even if much of the shortage is actually related to an inadequate distribution infrastructure.

The reality is that there are finite resources of land, water and air on this planet. An appraisal of the global situation can readily reveal that we humans have already exploited the majority of these resources. In many cases, pollution and ruination of resources have limited or negated productive capacity. In addition, there is widespread desertification that affects vast areas of potentially productive land. The North and South polar regions are not suited to the keeping of animals, let alone food production, and in fact their exploitation has been limited by statute and international agreements. Most people would also advocate the retention of natural forests and even a reversal of the deforestation that has occurred in the quest for new agricultural land around the world. The Kyoto protocol acknowledged the value of the carbon tied up within forests and highlighted concerns about the carbon discharges from intensified animal production.

The net result is that many veterinarians are working to assist in meeting the global demand for food production in an increasingly difficult physical and economic market. The veterinarians who interface with the production sectors are faced with the dilemma of recognising the views and wishes of the global urban population while also servicing farming businesses that operate in a highly competitive market with price-driven consumers. This dilemma means that veterinarians must take a balanced view in their protection of animal welfare, which they seek to maintain within the bounds of acceptability to the stakeholders involved.

This dilemma has been described exceptionally well in economic terms (5), demonstrating the conflicts and choices that face those who care for animals (Fig. 1). This description also applies to veterinary professionals, who are conscious of the views of society and the needs of farmers, and encounter these conflicts and choices in their daily work.

Veterinarians find themselves in the situation where they are advising animal owners and farmers to manage their animals in ways that are acceptable to consumers and society in general, and to maintain their animals at above minimum standards even as they strive for economic sufficiency (Fig. 2). Fortunately, when animal production is assessed on the basis of the individual animal, productive efficiency is greater when the animal is kept in better conditions and its welfare is good. In contrast, care needs to be exercised when economic return is calculated in terms of production units such as the area of land or volume of water. When this type of analysis is used, it may appear that production is more efficient on the basis of area or volume, but the result may be increased pressure on the



'Natural' welfare (point A):

- animal centred
- presumably what the animal itself would choose
- animal free to act as its natural instincts dictate – feeding pattern, social grouping, mating behaviour, rearing young, establishing and maintaining territory, aggression and imposing social dominance, etc.
- clearly inconsistent with domestication and commercial production.

'Maximal' welfare (point B):

- animal centred
- the best conditions attainable are offered within the (unnatural) environment of domestication
- apart from some restrictions on natural behaviour, the best possible food, shelter, space, physical comfort, health, safety, social interaction, etc, are provided
- farm animals are treated as well as we would treat our children
- not a realistic benchmark for economic livestock production.

'Desired' or 'appropriate' welfare (point E):

- this is human-centred (i.e. determined by human preferences)
- some trade-offs are made between animal welfare and meeting human interests
- costs to the animals occur because:
 - we initiate and manage their lives
 - we subject them to things they would not choose
 - in most cases, we kill them when it suits us
- husbandry conditions leave us feeling broadly comfortable with how animals are treated
- the conditions correspond to an overall image of the desired or appropriate welfare standard acceptable in our society
- 'appropriate welfare' represents the economic optimum position defined in its widest sense.

'Minimal' welfare (point D):

- this is human centred
- major trade-offs are made between animal welfare and human interests
- the husbandry conditions are at the lower limit that is socially acceptable; below it the animals are regarded as being subject to cruelty
- this is the boundary beyond which the exploitation of animals would be regarded universally in society as being unacceptable
- the concept of minimal welfare is practically the most amenable to definition and specification – its standards are embodied in much formal legislation and related legal instruments designed to safeguard animal welfare.

Welfare breakdown (point C):

- the animals' production is extended to the extreme of its biological capability
- pushing the animals beyond this point would cause catastrophic breakdowns in health and productivity
- this leads ultimately to collapse of the livestock production system.

Fig. 1
Conflicts and choices between animal welfare and productivity

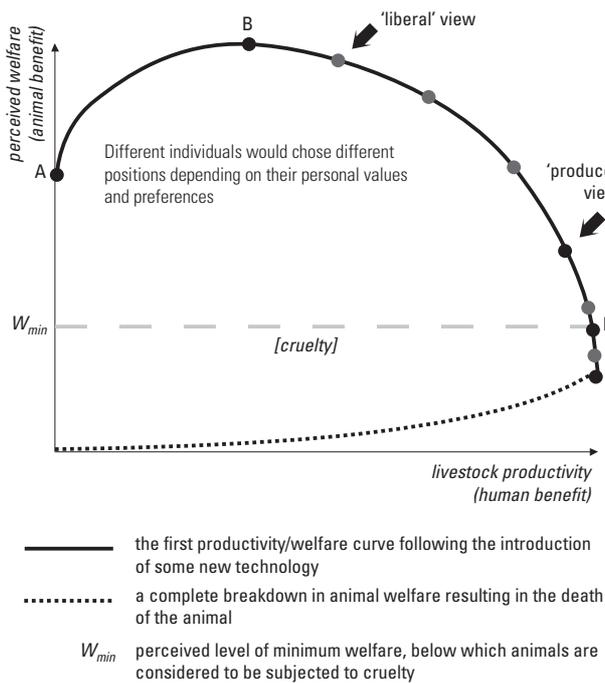


Fig. 2
Personal values and preferences in the definition of 'appropriate' welfare

animals within each production unit. Moreover, when the pressure becomes too much and animal welfare is compromised, the result may well be reduced efficiency and falling economic returns.

Each member of society will view this in his or her own way (Fig. 2). Given their particular values and preferences, different individuals may choose a point somewhere between 'maximal' welfare (B) which emphasises the interest of the animals and 'minimal' welfare (D) which is dominated by the human economic interest. The 'producer view' is represented as closer to this latter point, but not because livestock farmers have little concern for animal welfare. Rather, because there are no explicit financial rewards for high animal welfare, all the economic signals for commercial success (and survival) force a focus on achieving high animal productivity.

The decline in animal welfare standards in some sectors, especially intensive pig and poultry production, has now been recognised, and there are active lobbying and legislation programmes that are redressing this decline – as well as markets that are developing for higher-priced 'welfare-friendly' products. Examples include improvements in the cages for laying hens, a ban on the tethering and crating of pigs, measures taken to improve transportation and the price premiums for 'free-range' and organic livestock products.

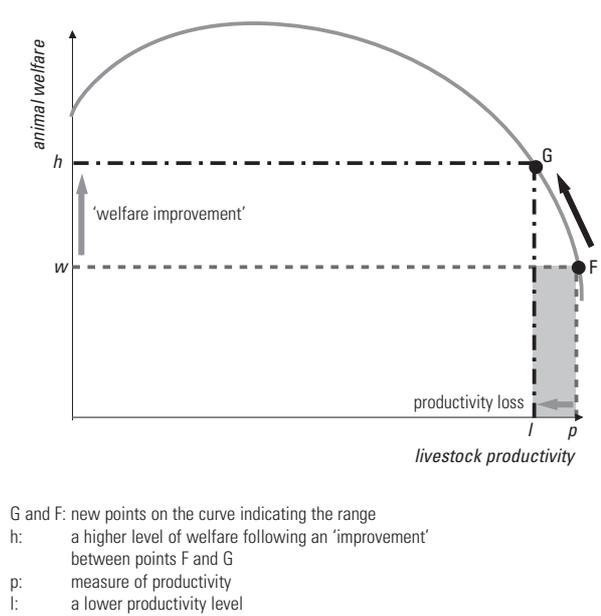


Fig. 3
Improving welfare implies some reduction in productivity

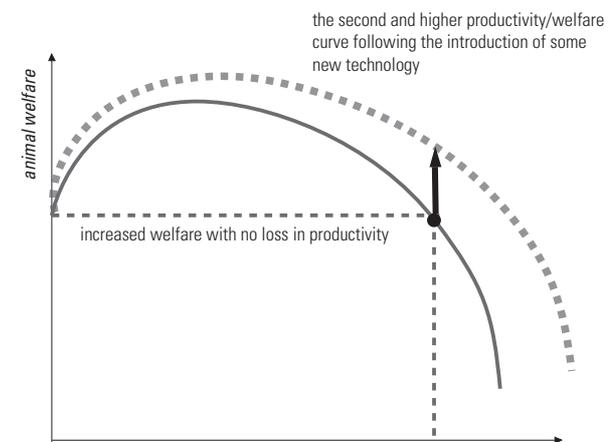


Fig. 4
New technology can improve welfare with no loss in productivity

Even under farming conditions aimed at increasing production, it is possible to maintain or even improve animal welfare, despite claims to the contrary (Figs 3 and 4). This can be achieved through the introduction of technological advances, such as vaccines or new feeds, or improved environmental management involving such things as housing and new ways to manage temperature, humidity or effluent. Sometimes there may be improvements of either welfare or production, while in some circumstances there may be improvements in both (Fig. 5).

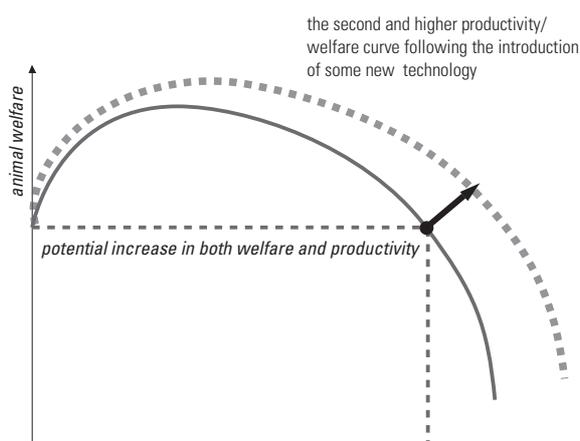


Fig. 5
Improving both welfare and productivity

A continuing challenge for veterinarians is to introduce further incremental improvements in animal welfare. This will mean monitoring the research literature, responding to the developments of new science and introducing new technology when it shows promise. While on some

occasions, new developments may produce greater welfare benefits than gains in production and vice versa in others, the challenge is to introduce these improvements for the beneficiaries, be they animal or human.

Communication within the profession and between veterinarians and their stakeholders continues to provide challenges. Communication that affects animal welfare is no exception. Veterinarians need to advise their clients and other stakeholders of welfare improvement possibilities and to speak of animal welfare outcomes, be they favourable or not. This is a significant challenge, given the increasing distance between the assumptions of urban stakeholders and the reality in which animals are kept.

Acknowledgements

Sincere gratitude is offered to Professor McNerney whose refreshing approach has enabled veterinarians to look afresh at their role in animal welfare. The collaboration between the WVA and the OIE has facilitated the international discussion on animal welfare in which the WVA has been able to participate (1).

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L'Association mondiale vétérinaire et le bien-être animal

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Résumé

L'Association mondiale vétérinaire, en tant que représentant mondial de la profession vétérinaire, reconnaît les influences qui agissent à l'échelle planétaire sur le bien-être animal et l'évolution du rôle du vétérinaire face aux changements d'attitude de la population humaine. Si les populations urbaines dictent désormais les normes en matière de bien-être animal, de nombreuses pratiques conservent un fondement culturel et même religieux. Les vétérinaires sont conscients de ces influences, mais fondent leurs recommandations en matière de bien-être animal sur des pratiques fondées scientifiquement. Les vétérinaires travaillent non seulement pour des clients urbains en soignant leurs animaux de compagnie mais aussi de façon importante pour des clients ruraux, qui sont la source d'approvisionnement en denrées alimentaires et en produits d'origine animale que recherche une population humaine de plus en plus exigeante. Les domaines controversés de la production animale intensive et du transport requis pour déplacer un grand nombre d'animaux dans le monde entier nécessitent un contrôle vétérinaire pour garantir que le bien-être animal est préservé. L'élaboration des normes relatives au bien-être animal est un processus continu, dont les principales actions internationales sont pilotées par l'Organisation mondiale de la santé animale.

Mots-clés

Association mondiale vétérinaire – Bien-être animal – Organisation mondiale de la santé animale – Profession vétérinaire – Vétérinaire.

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La Asociación Mundial de Veterinaria y el bienestar animal

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Resumen

La Asociación Mundial de Veterinaria, que representa internacionalmente a esa profesión, es consciente de la influencia de la evolución de la opinión mundial en el bienestar animal y la manera en que ha modificado las funciones de los veterinarios. Si bien hoy en día son los habitantes de las ciudades quienes dictan las normas relativas al bienestar animal, muchas prácticas siguen impregnadas por referencias culturales e, incluso, confesionales. Aunque son conscientes de ello, los veterinarios formulan recomendaciones sobre el bienestar basadas en la práctica científica únicamente. Los veterinarios no sólo atienden a los animales de compañía de clientes urbanos, sino también, y de manera significativa, a los clientes rurales que suministran los productos y subproductos animales necesarios para alimentar a una población humana cada vez más exigente. Para asegurarse de que se respete el bienestar animal, es preciso que sean veterinarios quienes supervisen la cría intensiva y el transporte y desplazamiento de grandes cantidades de animales por todo el mundo – dos esferas muy polémicas. En la actualidad se están formulando normas internacionales sobre el bienestar animal, bajo el liderazgo de la Organización Mundial de Sanidad Animal.

Palabras clave

Asociación Mundial de Veterinaria – Bienestar animal – Organización Mundial de Sanidad Animal – Profesión veterinaria – Veterinario.



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