



Capacity building to implement good animal welfare practices

FAO Expert Meeting

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“ FAO recognises the importance of animal welfare practices that lead to benefits for both people and their animals and supports their implementation. But, how can FAO contribute to inform and support producers in developing countries to access the benefits of good animal welfare practices? ”



INTRODUCTION

The welfare of humans and the welfare of animals are closely linked. In many regions, a secure supply of food for people depends on the health and productivity of animals, and these in turn depend on the care and nutrition that animals receive. Many diseases of humans are derived from animals, and the prevention of these animal diseases is

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important for safeguarding human health. Roughly one billion people, including many of the world's poor, depend directly on animals for income, social status and security as well as food and clothing, and the welfare of their animals is essential for their livelihood. Moreover, positive relations with animals are an important source of comfort, social contact and cultural identification for many people.

The use of animals for food production (which involves by far the largest number of animals used by humans) is changing rapidly. In the more industrialized countries, production based on grain-based diets (especially poultry and pig production) has shifted dramatically toward greater concentration of animals in fewer, larger units, typically in indoor facilities. In some countries, the number of farms raising pigs and poultry is now less than one tenth the number a half century ago, yet this much reduced number of farms are producing a greater output of animal products. Even more striking are the changes in countries with less developed economies. In the last half century, meat production and consumption in countries with developing economies has changed and increased greatly, and now accounts for more than half of global meat production.

These massive increases in production have involved a wide variety of production systems including subsistence agriculture, small-scale commercial production, and industrial-scale production using methods developed in the industrialized nations. Aspects of these various production systems, combined with the transportation and slaughter of enormous numbers of animals, raise a wide range of animal welfare issues.

As a backdrop to these developments, the human population of the world, and the correlated human demand for products of animal origin, continues to rise to unprecedented levels. The resulting escalation of animal production raises a number of ethical issues, including environmental sustainability and secure access to food, which must be considered alongside the growing concern about animal welfare.

Animal welfare has also become the focus of an emerging field of scientific research. Much of the basic work has been done in the economically developed countries, and is primarily focused on the problems of intensive animal production systems. However, the methods of animal welfare science are broadly applicable to a wide range of animal welfare problems seen across the spectrum of production methods, and to the global issues of animal welfare during slaughter and transportation.

Finally, animal welfare is coming to be recognized as highly relevant to success in international development. It is integral to programmes to improve animal health, to develop livestock production, to respond to natural disasters where animals are involved, and to improve the fit between the genetic constitution of animals and the environments



in which they are kept. Development agencies that fail to take animal welfare into account may miss important opportunities to improve the lives of people who depend on animals for their livelihood. In addition, compliance with animal welfare standards can promote improved technology and open access to international markets for products from less developed countries, thus contributing to development.

“FAO has decided to give more explicit and strategic attention to animal welfare”

For these many reasons, FAO has decided to give more explicit and strategic attention to animal welfare in its capacity building activities in countries with developing economies. To guide its activities, the FAO convened an Expert Meeting to provide advice on ‘Capacity building to implement good animal welfare practices’.

EXPERT MEETING

Experts and resource persons from Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America and Oceania attended the meeting. The experts participated in their independent professional capacities and not as representatives of their governments, employers or institutions. They replied to an open call and were then selected on the basis of their experience and geographic diversity. The meeting was associated with an open call for interested organizations and individuals to present their views and positions to the experts in an open forum.

In any discussion on animal welfare, a fundamental issue is what types or species of animals to include. The expert meeting focussed on the welfare of farm animals (domesticated terrestrial animals used in food production), including those used for draft. Thus, the discussion centred on cattle and other bovines, horses and other

equines, sheep, goats, pigs, and the various species of poultry that are commonly raised for meat or eggs. Many of the principles should also apply to other animal-related issues such as control of stray dogs, and they could well be extended in the future to the use and production of aquatic animals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.** Good animal welfare practices include prevention and treatment of disease and injury; prevention and mitigation of pain, distress and other negative states; and providing diets and living conditions that are suited to the needs and nature of animals.
- 2.** Many good animal welfare practices have multiple benefits for people as well as animals. By improving animal health and productivity, they help maintain the food supply for people who produce and use animal products. They sustain the livelihood of small-scale animal producers and thus help preserve stable rural communities. Good animal welfare practices can also contribute to food safety and to human health and psychological well-being. Especially in parts of the world where many people suffer from poverty and starvation, an approach to animal welfare that focuses on benefits to people is most likely to succeed.
- 3.** The treatment of animals is influenced by beliefs and values, which vary from culture to culture, regarding the nature of animals and their moral significance. Cultures also differ in the priority they attach to different aspects of animal welfare such as basic health and nutrition versus freedom from pain and distress. The view of animals as 'sentient beings', as reinforced by modern science, is spreading through scientific and veterinary education and provides an additional impetus to safeguard animal welfare.
- 4.** The scientific study of animal welfare is a multi-disciplinary field of research. It began largely in response to animal welfare concerns over intensive animal production, but its methods are broadly applicable to animal welfare problems in all production systems and to the global issues of humane slaughter and animal transportation. There is a need to develop expertise in animal welfare science in countries with developing economies, partly by creating partnerships with established centres of expertise.
- 5.** The scientific assessment of animal welfare is a key element in efforts to implement good animal welfare practices. Welfare assessment involves multiple variables and criteria. Such assessment is best used in a systems approach that seeks to identify causes of sub-optimal welfare, and opportunities for successful intervention, in the entire system or production chain. Animal welfare assessment should be done with the full participation of the people involved, in a process that also attempts to understand the perceptions and traditional practices of participants, and the social and material assets that they can bring to bear in solving animal welfare problems.
- 6.** A wide range of standards and programmes have been created to ensure the implementation of good animal welfare practices. These include:

- 1) voluntary welfare codes, often created by industry organizations,
- 2) corporate programmes, often used by retail or restaurant companies,
- 3) product differentiation programmes that allow consumers to purchase selectively,
- 4) legislated standards, and
- 5) international agreements created by treaties or intergovernmental organizations.

In promoting animal welfare, the different types of programmes also serve different political and commercial purposes, and they have different strengths and weaknesses; a legislative approach, for example, will only be effective if sufficient resources are devoted to its administration and enforcement. In any given situation, analysis is needed to determine what programmes would be most effective in promoting good animal welfare practices, and how implementation of such programmes could benefit animals and people.

7. Capacity building for implementing good animal welfare practices involves four elements:

- 1) education to create awareness of animal welfare and an understanding of its significance for successful animal production;
- 2) engagement to foster active involvement of people who work with animals;
- 3) training in specific procedures, and
- 4) communication among different international organizations, between stakeholders and providers of training, and among the different government departments, professional bodies and other organizations involved in animal welfare. Capacity building needs to be sympathetic to local knowledge and resources. Rather than seeking to impose standards that cannot be realized immediately, capacity building should facilitate the problem-solving abilities of participants so that they will be able to meet standards in the future. Ultimately, training should be done by local organizations and personnel; external expertise is most efficiently used to train future trainers.

8. Strategies that the FAO could use in promoting good animal welfare practices include the following:

- i) The FAO and other global organizations could proactively include animal welfare as a basic element of their projects, integrated with, and contributing to, other goals such as food safety and security, human and animal health, environmental sustainability, worker safety, rural development, gender equality, and social justice.
- ii) Effective capacity building for good animal welfare practices will require alliances among organizations, based on a shared understanding of the goals, accepted and complementary roles of different players, and coordinated efforts. The FAO could cooperate with, and encourage alliances among, other organizations including:
 - International agencies with an interest in animal welfare, including the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) which is developing internationally accepted standards of animal welfare, developing animal welfare strategies in certain regions through its Regional Commissions, and designating certain 'Collaborating Centres' of animal welfare research;

- international animal producer organizations which are providing leadership on animal welfare in their respective sectors and could provide a conduit for capacity building to reach local producers;
 - non-government organizations (NGOs), including animal welfare NGOs and development NGOs, many of which are already playing important roles in promoting good animal welfare practices;
 - governments and multilateral organizations which support training and awareness-building related to animal welfare; and
 - certain private-sector companies and financial institutions which include animal welfare as part of their corporate social responsibility programmes.
- iii) Given that animal welfare is being linked increasingly to trade and market access, the FAO and other agencies could help to build capacity in lower-income countries so that producers in these countries are better positioned to participate in such trade. Capacity building is also needed so that small- and medium-scale producers are not put at a competitive disadvantage compared to large, industrialized producers. Helping smaller producers to communicate and share resources could increase their ability to implement guidelines or standards, reduce production and transportation costs, and enable them to market larger quantities of products.
- 9.** Although animal welfare problems are extremely diverse, certain generic problem areas occur on a global basis. These include transportation especially over long distances, slaughter and pre-slaughter management, provision of adequate feed and water, the handling of animals by humans, culling of animals that are unhealthy or of low commercial value, and keeping animals under conditions for which they are not genetically suited. These problem areas provide logical starting points for needs assessment, capacity building, training materials, research projects, and the creation of incentives. Moreover, for poor or landless farmers, making a satisfactory living is often the first step toward being able to provide appropriate animal care. Hence, improving the economic well-being of low-income animal owners is a high-priority element in efforts to improve animal welfare.

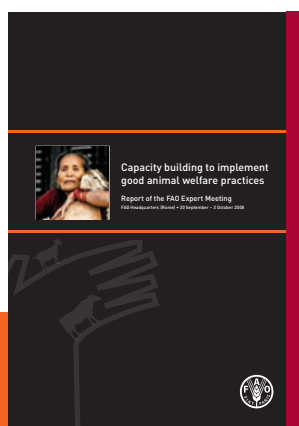
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on their deliberations, the experts made the following recommendations:

- 1.** Improvements to animal welfare in food production systems can play a significant role in improving the welfare of people by such means as improving access to food of animal origin, improving economic returns through increased livestock productivity, improving the efficiency of draft animals, and reducing risks to human health through improved food safety and animal health. Attention to animal welfare can be of special benefit to countries with less developed economies through technology improvement, increasing access to markets, and fostering international cooperation. To support good animal welfare practices in countries with less developed economies, the FAO should give priority to practices that lead to benefits for both people and animals.

2. Beyond such practical and economic benefits, attention to animal welfare can have broader social benefits. It can contribute to teaching an ethic of care; it can be a force for social cohesion within a family, a community or a business; and positive relations with animals are an important factor in human (as well as animal) well-being. These benefits should be recognized in capacity building programmes.
3. Animal welfare should not be treated as a stand-alone issue but as one among many socially important goals including food safety and security, human and animal health, environmental sustainability, worker safety, rural development, gender equality, and social justice.
4. As an initial step in pursuing animal welfare objectives, the FAO should ensure that animal welfare is integrated into, and contributes to, its existing programmes in areas such as animal health and nutrition, livestock development, sustainable livelihoods, and emergency responses where animals are involved.
5. Animal welfare is strongly influenced by human behaviour. In capacity building to improve animal welfare, the FAO (and those who deliver FAO-sponsored projects) should attempt to understand and engage with the people who work with animals, recognize the cultural norms, knowledge and abilities that they have, cooperate with them to identify means of improving animal welfare as a way of better achieving their goals, and facilitate their own innovation and problem-solving.
6. As a general approach, improving the welfare of animals should begin with an assessment of the risks and opportunities in the entire system or production chain, and a search for improvements that will be practical in the given situation. Assessment should include science-based assessment of the needs and welfare of the animals, and risk assessment to identify causes of sub-optimal welfare. In many cases the most effective approach is likely to be a continual-improvement process based on achievable targets rather than the importation of radically different procedures based on foreign technology and values.
7. In some situations, formal animal welfare assurance programmes (national laws, international agreements, corporate programmes, and others) provide valuable guidance and incentives for improving animal welfare, and may facilitate access to certain markets. As part of the assessment of risks and opportunities, FAO should consider the possible role and benefits of such programmes, and any capacity building that is needed to facilitate compliance for countries and producers that wish to comply.
8. Scientific research on animal welfare provides the scientific evidence behind many animal welfare practices and standards. The FAO should consider working with centres of expertise in animal welfare science to facilitate access by member countries to the findings of animal welfare research and to encourage research on issues of importance to countries with developing economies.
9. Many countries are showing interest in creating and/or revising animal welfare legislation, in some cases to comply with established standards. The FAO should consider working with other organizations to provide relevant assistance on animal welfare legislation to member countries on request.

10. Although animal welfare problems are extremely diverse, several problem areas stand out as high priority across many regions and production systems. These are: transportation, slaughter (including pre-slaughter management), food and water, handling/herding methods, culling and disposition of animals that are sick or of low commercial value, and the keeping of animals under conditions for which they are not genetically suited. These problem areas provide logical starting points for capacity building efforts. In addition, as poverty can severely limit the ability of owners to care for animals, poverty reduction among animal producers is a significant priority for improving animal welfare.
11. Improving animal welfare globally will require strategic partnerships. In particular, the FAO should work in cooperation with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) which is developing international standards together with regional animal welfare strategies through certain of its Regional Commissions, the World Health Organization, and other institutions engaged at an international level. It should also work together with academic and producer organizations, animal welfare and other relevant non-governmental organizations, financial institutions, and the private sector to facilitate the funding, execution and communication of initiatives related to animal welfare. The FAO should also facilitate partnerships among organizations with complementary capabilities (such as organizations with funding capabilities and those with competence in training) whose cooperation could support the implementation of good animal welfare practices.
12. The FAO should identify and empower staff persons, who have expertise in animal welfare and its applications, to put these recommendations into action.



The Report, in English, French and Spanish is available on-line at:
www.fao.org/ag/animalwelfare.html

To obtain a copy free of charge, please contact:
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