

Animals and People First. Why good animal welfare is important for feeding people, for trade and for the future

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This paper has been produced in 2005 in consultation with colleagues in Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, EU, India, Japan, Mexico, South Africa and USA.

Agriculture and the WTO

Agriculture is vital to every country in the world. It feeds people, it earns income and it has many other impacts. For these reasons, the member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiate the Agreement on Agriculture¹ to regulate agricultural trade.

Livestock contributes to both the potential and the problems of agriculture. Meat and animal products are important in people's diet and also valuable trade goods. However, manure can cause pollution. One other issue receiving increased attention is the welfare of farm animals: this is a matter of public concern in many countries, particularly in Europe². This paper explains why attention to farm animal welfare can help agriculture to feed people, to promote trade and to prevent future problems such as pollution – and why it therefore needs to be considered in the Agreement on Agriculture.

What is Animal Welfare?

Caring for animal welfare means keeping animals healthy and free from suffering³. It is achieved by keeping them in clean, well-designed houses, or in natural conditions such as grassland⁴.

Poor welfare is caused by neglect or by overcrowding in dirty conditions that spread disease. Some countries are banning systems such as crowded "battery cages" for hens⁵.

Concern for welfare is based on science. For example, animal health is affected by other aspects of welfare, so the World Animal Health Organization (OIE) is setting up worldwide animal welfare standards⁶.

Animal Welfare and Food Security

In most cases in most countries, improving the treatment of animals (for example by protecting them from disease, heat or cold) also improves their productivity: "Look after

your animals and they will look after you.” Experience shows, though, that farmers do not always recognise such opportunities. It is useful to discuss the importance of animal care, to help them provide food for themselves, their families and others⁷.

Food security is best achieved by growing food on a local basis for the people who need it, such as people in rural areas. If farms are fairly small, complex infrastructure is not needed and people can be helped to look after their animals well and productively, feeding themselves and also earning some income⁸.

By contrast, some countries are building large, intensive farms, partly because these are thought to have provided “cheap food” in developed countries. All too often, though, these do not provide food security in developing countries: the meat they produce is too expensive for the really poor and hungry, and such giant farms destroy the job structure and social stability of agriculture-based societies. In Brazil, for example, intensification of the poultry industry is driving thousands of small, family farms out of business⁹. Developing countries should also be wary of donations or exports of “cheap food” from developed countries (only apparently cheap, because of subsidies), that undermine the ability of local farmers to feed their own country’s people¹⁰.

“Cheap Food”

Today apparently cheap (but subsidized) Western food exports to poor countries mainly enter the cities of the developing world, thus competing in the only markets which small-scale domestic producers can reach. Rather than empowering the poor to get started on the economic ladder, capturing the national urban market with imported food removes the ladder. Professor John Hodges, (EAAP, formerly FAO and University of British Columbia)¹⁰.

Animal Welfare and Trade

As improving welfare also generally improves productivity¹¹, this benefits export as well as home consumption for most countries.

That is less true, though, for developed countries. Many consumers in Europe say that they favour organic food and methods of production that benefit animal welfare such as free range². Land prices and labour are costly in Europe, so producing organic and high-welfare food is expensive.

Many developing countries have extensive land and relatively cheap labour. These can give them a competitive advantage in agricultural trade, especially if they target the high-value organic and welfare markets in Europe. Thus countries in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere may be able to sell into these niche markets with little change to their

agriculture. This is because many aspects of their treatment of animals – such as giving them plenty of space – are already those that people in developed countries prefer.

Developing countries may receive trade-related assistance and capacity building for access to niche markets including high welfare, under the Green Box of the Agreement on Agriculture¹².

Developed countries are allowed to help their farmers to improve welfare under the Rural Development Programme¹³. Other support should also be possible under the Green Box, as it should not distort trade (or should do so minimally). In such countries improving welfare will probably reduce production, and competitors will gain even more advantage from cheap land and labour¹⁴.

Assistance to Developing Countries

Europe buys about one third of Namibia's beef exports, and this is increasing because the Farm Assured Namibian Meat Scheme ensures lack of disease and artificial hormones, and protection of animal welfare and the environment. The EU provided trade-related assistance and capacity building for this programme¹².

The EU is helping to fund training and support programmes for slaughterhouses in East Africa. This assists in improving hygiene and low-stress handling of animals, for better meat quality and increased exports¹⁵.

Animal Welfare and the Future

Taking care of animal welfare can also help to protect the environment and therefore the future sustainability of food production⁹. Handled properly, livestock can be an important part of land management, including eating vegetation unsuitable for human consumption and fertilizing the soil. By contrast, intensive farming is often inhumane to animals, and is environmentally unsustainable: these are reasons why many developed countries are beginning to recognize that intensification was a mistake and redeveloping extensive methods. Intensive farms need huge supplies of feed and water to be transported in from elsewhere in the country or even abroad, much of which could otherwise have been used for people. Water shortages are widely predicted to be one of the major problems of the current century¹⁶. Intensive farms produce huge quantities of manure, with dangerous concentrations of minerals and biologically active compounds, and all too frequently these result in soil and water pollution¹⁷. Livestock kept in extensive conditions use local resources and recycle the productivity of the land.

Methods used in intensive farming may also increase the chance of diseases that are bad for both animals and people, and add to pressures on the viability of farming. Such methods contributed to the development of Mad Cow Disease (BSE). Keeping large numbers of animals close together increases spread of organisms causing food poisoning. For example, there are about 73,000 human infections and 60 deaths from *E. coli* in the USA

each year, many from infected animal products. In addition, when diseases such as Foot & Mouth or Avian Influenza do break out on large farms, they affect very large numbers of animals⁹.

It is clear that “Humane farming is sustainable, sustainable farming is humane”¹⁸.

Assistance to European Farmers

The EU offers farmers a Rural Development Programme that is not intended to increase production but to enhance sustainability including animal welfare¹³.

In 2005 stock-keepers in Scotland can apply for grants towards training in veterinary health schemes.

Farmers in Wales have received payments for improving sustainability and animal welfare. These are not trade-distorting: if anything they reduce production, because one criterion is keeping stocking density low. They should therefore qualify as Green Box payments¹³.

Conclusions

- All **WTO stakeholders need better understanding of farm animal welfare**. Emphasis and interpretation of this subject will always differ between countries. However, humane treatment of animals is never inappropriate
- Payments to support **farmers' costs in improving welfare** (and not other production costs) are not trade-distorting (or are minimally so) and **should be allowed under the Green box**
- Trade related assistance and capacity building could provide much increased access for developing countries to niche markets in developed countries, in organic and high-welfare animal products. These should also be developed under the Green Box.
- Food safety is paramount and consumers increasingly care about other aspects of how their food is produced. **Labelling programmes should be expanded** to give consumers information about their food.
- All these approaches are even more appropriate to bilateral and regional agreements than to multilateral agreements.
- **Giving consideration to farm animal welfare** – whether in theoretical agreements or in practical farming – **can improve the lives of both animals and people, as well as protecting the environment**.

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Pictures

| | Description | Comments | Caption |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Men with calves | Cover | |
| 2 | Chickens in India | On first text page | Intensive housing, like this battery cage in India, causes problems for both animals and the environment |
| 3 | Free laying hens in UK cages, | On first text page | Europe is phasing out battery and many people will pay more for free-range animal products |
| 4 | Cattle market in Philippines | In section on trade | Animals that are well looked after will help farmers feed their families and bring in income |
| 5 | Sheep and shepherds animals, | On same page as 6 | With small groups of farmers can look after each individual carefully |
| 6 | Goats in Philippines | On same page as 5 | Animals kept indoors, like these goats in the Philippines, often have foot and leg problems and grow slowly |
| 7 | Sow in Philippines | Near Conclusions | Keeping animals in extensive conditions – like this sow and her piglets in the Philippines – benefits |