





# Animal welfare in a global perspective, the brief version

Welfare of livestock

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Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and  
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# Animal welfare in a global perspective, the brief version

The welfare of livestock, farmed fish and wild animals that live within the direct range of influence of people is not only a Dutch or European issue, due to particularly advancing globalisation. Meanwhile animal welfare is a widely recognised issue within the Netherlands and the European Union. In Europe it is generally assumed that animal welfare is not a matter of great importance in the rest of the world, without having many facts underlying such an assumption. This is a gap that should be filled if we want to be able to effectively develop a global policy.

The report *Animal welfare in a global perspective*, that is summarised here, is a first survey of the welfare status of the above mentioned animal groups and concerning regulations in a large number of non-European countries (fish and wild animals in Europe are considered). Also an indication is given as to in what way animal welfare issues are looked at in these countries. On the one hand this report is the basis for a better insight and more thorough knowledge of the animal welfare situation in the world, which may be improved by additions and specifications. On the other hand, the report will enable us to identify the opportunities for improvement, to establish priorities and, at the proper time, to measure effects of policy and other adjustments.

The report materialised on the basis of information collected from and through the Dutch agricultural councils through questionnaires, the study of literature and talks with experts. Data on the following countries are included: Egypt, Kenya, Ethiopia and South Africa in Africa; Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Canada and the US in the Americas; the Asian countries China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, South Korea, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam; in the Middle East: Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

## 1. Measuring welfare

There is still not any adequate, generally recognised definition of animal welfare and thus no objective measuring instrument with criteria to measure welfare. That is why the definition of welfare varies from country to country. But also between town and countryside there are differences in



Green: the 49 countries that were approached via the agricultural councils for information.  
Red shaded: the 23 countries which responded.

meaning, just as between rich and poor populations. The variance is not random and unlimited, however; often the 'five freedoms' are mentioned according to the Brambell-report. These guidelines were formulated in 1965 and are the widely accepted basic preconditions for an animal-worthy existence. Animals should have freedom from hunger, thirst and wrong diet, from physical discomfort, from disease, injury and pain, from fear and distress and should have freedom to express normal behaviour.

As generally accepted basis the standards of the *Office International des Epizooties* (OIE), the world organisation for animal health, apply. These standards include Brambell's freedoms, but also ask for among others (preventive)



veterinary treatment and humane slaughter conditions. In this report welfare is roughly considered to be the quality of life, as experienced by the animal itself. This should be determined by objective, animal-based parameters. The definitions and development of these parameters are still under construction.

## 2. 2. Findings

### Legislation and regulations

Nineteen of the countries concerned had some form of protective legislation for wild and/or livestock animals, sometimes as part of national legislation, but also in other forms, to official standards and voluntary standards. In a number of countries NGOs play an active part in the development of legislation, regulations and standardisation. The existing regulation is usually more explained by animal and human health, fighting maltreatment and economic or environmentally technical considerations than by animal welfare.

Even though laws and regulations are in effect, this does not always mean they are lived by or maintained. Most countries underpin the OIE-standards, but far from all practice what they preach. Countries such as Argentina and Vietnam have difficulties in enforcing one's own rules, which is also acknowledged by the OIE itself. Poor countries simply lack the manpower and means. Sometimes a country fails for other reasons; in the US, for example, there are still illegal dog fights.

It seems as if enforcing is stricter as there is more economic dependency on biodiversity and adequate wildlife – for example, tourism in parts of Africa – or when hygiene and health requirements are to be met for reasons of export. Also a positive connection between level of and enforcing the regulations and material prosperity seems to exist.

### Husbandry practices

The more strongly a country is industrialised, the more modern and intensive the livestock sector and the lesser use of draught or pack animals. In a country as Ethiopia there are only smallholders, often shepherds, and hardly any facilities such as slaughterhouses. Slaughtering is done at home. On the other side of the spectrum we can see almost only large, intensive farms in countries such as the US and Canada. Other countries are in between. In Mexico, for example, there are large, modern farms as well as many small, self-



Outline of the regulations. Green countries: a fair amount of legislation that improves animal welfare, orange countries: hardly any legislation and red: not at all.



supporting farmers with a few heads of cattle in the backyard. Russia has a tradition of large-scaleness, dating from the former Soviet Union.

Scale and intensity of farms do not tell much about animal welfare. Modern, intensive farms usually have better feed provision, better health control and climate-regulated facilities, but on the small-scale farms and there where cattle are kept in the meadows, animals often have more freedom of movement and more possibilities of expressing natural behaviour. Sometimes they also have a higher-quality relationship with their caretakers.

Poverty and lack of knowledge are ingredients for treating animals badly. Pack and draught animals are often overburdened and hit, while in Egypt, for example, sometimes horses are still ritually branded under the assumption that this will make the horses stronger.

Transport and the process of slaughtering are main weak points. Animals are often underway too long and sometimes in cages or lorries that are too cramped or unsuitable. Sometimes animals are unnecessarily transported across the borders, only to have them slaughtered. Some countries have inadequate slaughterhouses, if at all. The working method is often very animal-unfriendly, even if there are rules. Particularly local slaughterhouses are doing badly as to

the conditions and the hygiene for people and animals; large-scale integrations perform in a better way.

Fish is farmed in many countries and in various ways, mostly in ponds with or without additional feeding, sometimes also in net cages at sea. Flow and recirculation systems are increasingly applied, in which fish is kept at high densities. Little is known about fish welfare. With the exception of Norway, hardly anything has been arranged in this respect. Outside Europe there is little attention for fish. For the benefit of the European Commission, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is working on a risk analysis concerning the welfare of common farmed fish.

### The role of NGOs and international organisations

There seems to be a connection between the presence and activity of NGOs in a country and the extent of attention for animal welfare, but not between the latter and how serious the situation is considered. There are sometimes surprisingly many NGOs, for that matter: Egypt, for example, has eleven. Sometimes they try to inform the population and raise their consciousness. In other cases, for example, in South Africa and Kenya, they particularly aim at government and industry in order to develop norms and standards and to get them adopted. In general one can say that NGOs exert pressure effectively and are even more successful concerning specific

issues than what would have been possible via other avenues.

The WTO has not much to contribute as to welfare. The international trade right does not allow distinction between home-grown products and import products, so import cannot be subject to welfare preconditions by this way. At the World Bank as well as the FAO, attention is paid to animal welfare, the former being prepared to stimulate animal-friendly production, particularly via certification. The FAO provides much information on responsible management, especially in developing countries. They support intensive husbandry systems.

The EU mainly aims at harmful effects on welfare that takes place in the modern intensive pig and poultry industry. They want to raise the matter within the WTO to create understanding and support for improvement, not to erect trade barriers.

The OIE, with 174 member countries, plays an important part. This organisation is engaged in issues such as controlling epidemics (stamping out) and has already developed standards for transport and the slaughtering process.

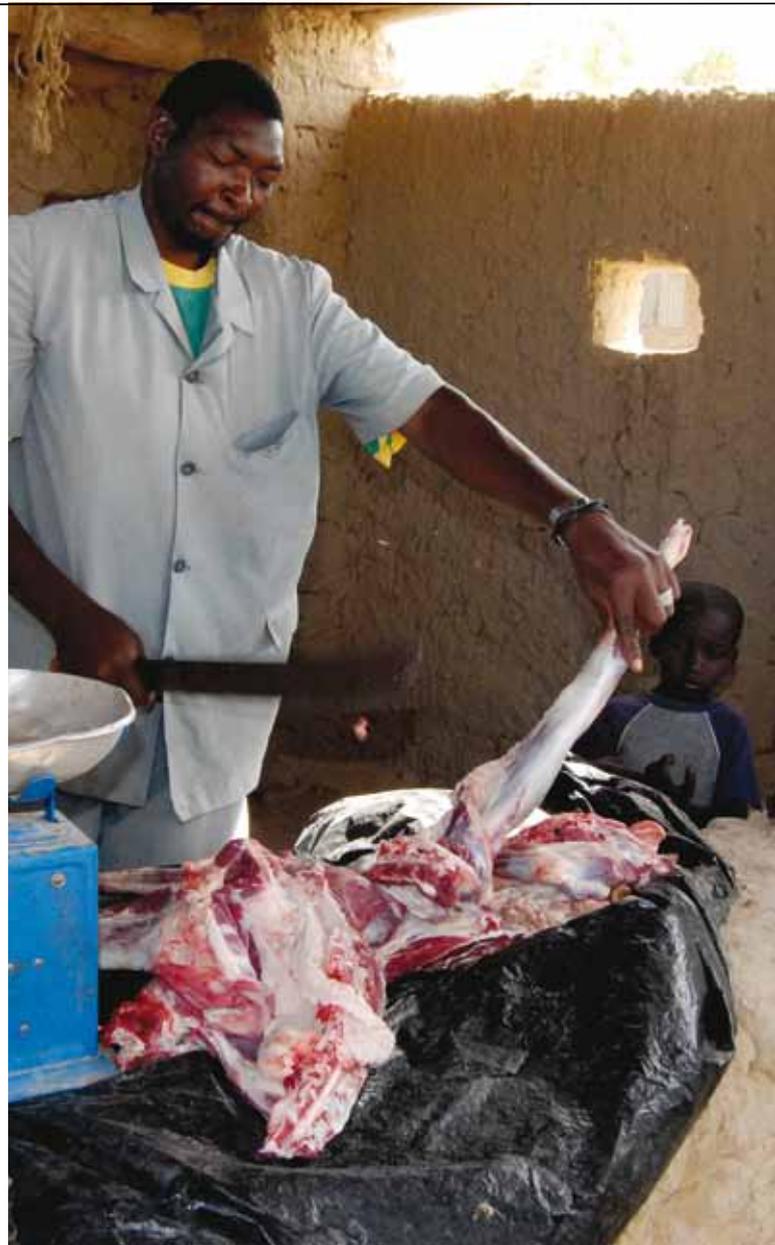
### Religious effects

Throughout the world religion has a considerable effect on farming. Although there are large differences among the predominantly Muslim countries, pigs cannot usually be found. India does not slaughter cows for religious reasons. On the other hand, almost all religions preach respect for the animal, but this does not tell much about practice. Thus religion is important, but does not seem fit as a strategic instrument for improving animal welfare.

The practical effect of animal-friendly and respectfully-looking religious values can even be disastrous. The current Hindu ban on slaughtering animals means that animals are left to their own devices or are tied up without water until death follows, a fate that is met by particularly bull calves. Then there are also the from a welfare point of view doubtful practices of halal and kosher slaughter, where the animal has to bleed to death without an anaesthetic.

### Attitudes

The importance given to the welfare of animals partly depends on the presence of the awareness that animals have needs, and on the knowledge one has of these needs. But similar important is what the material and immaterial circumstances of the population are. The self-image



Outline of the extent to which the general public is aware of the importance of animal welfare.  
Green: welfare is a point. Red: no attention for animal welfare.



influences the other's image, including that of the animal and its welfare. Poverty, hunger, poor human health and insecurity have precedence over the attention for animals, their welfare and even their health. In general, the interest in the subject seems to increase, although in most countries animal health problems and economic preconditions play a larger part – for example, in relation to export – than the welfare itself. In prosperous countries such as Canada and the US, this is somewhat different, here there is an increasing wish to a better treatment of animals. In California, for example, the production of foie gras has been prohibited as of 2004 by means of a referendum. There is also much concern in the US about battery cages for laying hens– the more up-market supermarkets are changing to free-range eggs and different ways of self-regulation have been realised. However, there is little concern about broilers. On the other hand, there is much attention for the fate of laboratory animals, particularly in relation to testing for cosmetics.

### **Welfare and world trade**

The increasing attention for animal welfare has activated various large producers. McDonald's, for example, demands from its producers to meet strict requirements concerning the slaughtering condition for cattle, living conditions of pigs and broiler welfare, just as KFC. H&M banned Australian merino wool due to unacceptable practices. The ice-cream brand Ben & Jerry's prohibits its American milk producers to

use growth hormones and in Europe buys only milk from sustainably managed farms with an eye for animal welfare. These are concrete examples of how the international trade connections can directly influence and improve animal welfare. Private standards that are realised by, for example, consumers, NGOs and by opinions about sustainable entrepreneurship in a market, produce improvements in supplying countries. Multinationals contribute to harmonising and improvement because they will eventually be inclined to working according to the same standards in all their branches. To conclude, animal welfare is also improved by the necessity for exporters to comply with import requirements that are set by trade partners such as the EU.

## **3. A bird's-eye view of three animal worlds**

### **Aquaculture**

Large-scale fish farming in ponds has a respectable long-standing tradition in many places in the world. However, the past decades the sector has increased explosively by an entirely new range of husbandry systems, from net cages at open sea to various flow and recirculation systems on land. Nevertheless, not much is known about the welfare of fish and attention for this can, as yet, only be found in Europe. Also there are health risks involved for animal and humans,

for example by medicine residues. With the exception of Norway, where as of 2010 new legislation will be in force, there is little regulation concerning these areas. However, there are hopeful signs. As mentioned above, the EFSA carries out research on the welfare of farmed fish, but also NGOs in Europe have already attracted attention to fish welfare from the supermarkets, as part of the trend of sustainability. A powerful instrument to improve fish welfare is, for example, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), which certifies sustainable fishing. If welfare became part of the MSC-certification, this would be an enormous step forward. Also from countries such as Turkey there are signs that one is willing to slaughter fish anaesthetised, as a reaction to the developments in Europe.

### Broilers and laying hens

The world of laying hens differs considerably from that of broilers. Throughout the world laying hens are mainly kept in cages, a practice that, as far as classical battery cages are concerned, will be banned in the EU as of 2012. The US and Australia have not reached that point yet, but also here is a growing awareness that such systems are undesirable. This has already led to relatively modest guidelines for improvement that are endorsed by the greater part of the industry. Recently California has banned battery cages by referendum, an event that is likely to be the start of drastic changes in the American egg industry. In India, the world's third producer of eggs and egg products, this is different. Battery systems with far less space per animal than elsewhere are common practice, the welfare of hens is not considered, neither by the government, nor by the public. Broilers are usually housed in large groups on litter. As of 2010 the EU enforces regulations on the number of broilers that can be kept per m<sup>2</sup>.

The largest exporters of poultry meat to the EU are Brazil and Thailand. In both countries the animal density is lower than the maximum that will be enforced in the EU, due to the warmer climate and the low land price. Otherwise, Brazil does not have legislation on chicken welfare on the farm or during transport. Thailand has an official system of –in practice noncommittal – recommendations in relation to animal welfare and animal health. Large export firms in both countries are willing, however, to meet requirements set by their trade partners.

### Wildlife

Large wildlife species within or near land used by people are usually considered too numerous for ethical or economic reasons. Particularly as to predators reasons for safety are





mentioned. Lack of food among animals is such an ethical reason. Seals are hunted because they are considered to affect the fish stock, wild boars and elephants because they destroy gardens and agricultural land. The safety reason is brought up for bears being introduced into the Pyrenees or wolves appearing in Central Europe. Sometimes animals are considered health risks. This happened to the bison in Yellowstone Park, which were said to carry brucellosis. A special case is the stray dogs in some countries, which, for example, in Kenya are killed by strychnine, whether it is relevant or not.

What is 'too much/many' decreasingly depends on the characteristics of the prevailing ecosystem, but increasingly on human values and interests. Nature is becoming a compromise nature, acceptable to the most important local stakeholders. Moreover, human actions such as fencing wildlife parks can throw the ecosystem off balance, with peaks in numbers of animals, causing trouble. In the resulting control and solution of the ethical problems, NGOs play an important part, next to governments and scientists. Two completely different ethical perspectives apply: apart from opinions where welfare of the individual animal is prevailing, there is also the eco-ethics that focuses attention on welfare of the population in a particular area.

There are different possibilities of countering overpopulation, each with their own drawbacks. Non-intervention is one of them. In some cases moving part of the population is possible, as in the North American programmes of recovery

of the moose and reindeer stocks in areas where they have disappeared. The third possibility is depletion by hunting, which arouses, in many places, ethical and emotional opposition. In Australia, where each year large numbers of kangaroos are allowed to be shot in remote areas, it is unclear how many animals escape wounded and die a slow and painful death. On the other hand, many Africans consider the fourth tactic, expensive contraception programmes to keep, for example, the elephant stock within bounds, a waste, because hunting provides various useable products. The policy in the Dutch Oostvaardersplassen to leave the cadavers of the shot deer is unique. Almost always horns, meat and other parts of the shot animals are traded for the benefit of the local population.

## 4. Conclusions

- In most countries there is increasing attention for animal welfare, which does not mean, however, that this attention is considerable. In many countries other issues have priority, such as poverty, lack of food and insecurity, and animal welfare is not at all an issue for the population. Sometimes it is only or mainly pet animals, laboratory animals and/or wildlife that are focused on.
- Recognised worldwide welfare problems are transportation (circumstances and duration), the slaughtering process (extent of inconvenience) and stray dogs. However, also traditional as well as modern

husbandry systems and practice can threaten animal welfare, because often little notice is taken of the species-specific needs of the animal.

- Poverty and ignorance seem to have a negative effect on animal welfare concern. Vice versa better living conditions for humans together with more knowledge seem to promote the attention for animal needs.
- Worldwide there are varied ways of farming, from minimal self-supporting family farms to large ultramodern mega farms and from intensive closed systems to farms with free roaming cattle, sometimes also within the same region. There is no direct connection between way of farming and farm size and animal welfare; various circumstances (culture, knowledge, capital and climate) play a part. It is suggested, however, that on large, modern farms there is less disease, but animals also have less room.
- There are particular welfare-threatening systems that cannot be improved, such as battery cages for laying hens and crated calves. They do not meet the basic welfare requirements, as the five freedoms from the Brambell-report and should therefore disappear.
- There is still little concrete legislation and regulation. Where it exists, enforcement is often lacking. Both are only improving slowly.
- It is not a matter of course that more regulations are always necessary. Sometimes traditional practices that fit well in the surroundings produce good results without government intervention. Sometimes voluntarily agreed standards within the sector suffice.
- A positive connection between a country's number of active NGOs and attention for animal welfare seems to exist. NGOs can be a guiding factor.
- Pressure from consumers at home and abroad can urge the sector to adapt and improve, partly at instigation of NGOs.
- Countries as Turkey and Argentina have indicated that they want to and can meet the requirements as to animal welfare, should the EU set rules as to import. Export opportunities are thus a means to realise welfare improvements, at least in the export-directed part of the industry. While economic factors can threaten welfare locally, globalisation can work positively. Production for the home market and for export can therefore result in large differences.
- Although religion and culture are determinant to a large extent as to opinions on animal welfare, the areas where such a religion, for example the Islam, is dominant show yet large mutual differences. A good understanding of local cultures is therefore crucial for taking appropriate measures.
- Because countries differ in their opinions on character and importance of animal welfare, there is a need for clear, generally accepted standards. Here is where the OIE comes into the picture, which has already developed standards for transportation and slaughtering practices.
- Outside Europe there is little attention for farmed fish. The EU's import requirements can, however, lead to improvements. Within the EU, NGOs and large supermarket chains are devoted to improving the welfare of fish.
- There is no ethically problem-free way of dealing with population peaks in wildlife populations.



## 5. Recommendations

There is a rapid development in organised thinking about animal welfare in an international context. There is a need for centralising knowledge to be able to follow the developments closely and to map these out for governments and international organisations.

- One should work towards a system of objective, animal-based indicators, regarding all life stages, including transportation and slaughtering.
- A good insight into the cultural, religious and economic frameworks that characterise a certain area is crucial for defining an effective course to improve or maintain animal welfare in that particular area.
- The enormous diversity in ways of farming and climate and other circumstances means that in legislation one should exclusively aim at purpose of regulation (e.g. what the welfare outcome should be). Focus on means of regulation (e.g. descriptors of the housing systems or management procedures) should be avoided. Within as well as outside the EU serious attention for problems as to enforcing is necessary. The OIE can make a substantial contribution to developing and defining norms.
- Globalisation can work well in animal welfare. Import requirements do not only affect the exporting country; many countries also indicate that they are willing and able to meet the requirements as to animal welfare. Furthermore, organic production, for example, offers opportunities to less developed countries to make their traditional, little intensive husbandry systems extra profitable, which results in room for improvement, provided that the export prices level out.
- The link between prosperity and animal welfare should be exploited by taking the welfare aspect into account in improving the production methods, which is also the avenue the World Bank pursues.
- Better animal welfare can also be economically profitable. Healthier animals will produce better. Moreover, entry is gained to that segment of the home market that is susceptible to animal-friendly production. Eventually this will also open up possibilities for the European markets.
- It should be prevented that highly-developed areas export their welfare problems, by compensating for the rejection of unacceptable systems by selling the rejected systems to elsewhere, or that products produced in an unacceptable way are bought from elsewhere, for example, battery cage eggs.
- With targeted information and education, often much can be gained at little cost. Worldwide, animal welfare starts with countering maltreatment, as was done in Europe.
- The government can promote the apparently effective work of the NGOs and should aim at transparency and consumer information.

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