



Animal health is an essential component of animal welfare. In the absence of any normative global framework to promote animal welfare and at the request of its Members, since the early 2000s the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) decided to develop the first international standards in this field. These standards are, as always, science-based.

THE ISSUES

Animal welfare is a complex subject with scientific, ethical, economic, cultural and political dimensions. Today, animal producers are increasingly taking animal welfare into account and some have come to see it as a standard of quality of their products. There is growing consumer interest in animal welfare worldwide, making it an economic issue on the world market for animals and animal products.

THE CHALLENGES

The perception of animal welfare or of what does or does not constitute an act of cruelty to animals differs from one region and culture to another. The main challenge is to reach a consensus amongst all OIE Members, the sole common point being the exclusive use of a scientific basis to establish standards for adoption.

Furthermore, animal welfare involves veterinary ethical concepts which demand specialised expertise. It is therefore a priority to integrate animal welfare as a core subject in veterinary education and to promote applied research as the scientific basis for standards and regulations.

As a result, the OIE has designated three Animal Welfare Collaborating Centres or networks located in Italy, New Zealand-Australia and Chile-Uruguay to conduct applied research, training and capacity-building missions for OIE Members requesting help in this field.

(<http://www.oie.int/en/our-scientific-expertise/collaborating-centres/list-of-centres/>)

AN INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP

To address all aspects of animal welfare, especially scientific issues, the OIE set up a Working Group on Animal Welfare in 2002. Its eight members, experts selected for their scientific excellence, are representative of the geographical and cultural diversity of the OIE.

Representation is also drawn from the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), a consortium of non-governmental organisations, from the global meat and milk associations, as well as from the global farmers' association. On a rotational basis, a representative from one of the three aforementioned industry sectors participates as a full member, while representatives of the other two industry organisations participate as observers. In 2011 the International Egg Commission (IEC) is the full member; in 2009 and 2010 the International Meat Secretariat (IMS) and the International Dairy Federation (IDF) respectively, were the full members.

THE 2ND OIE GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON ANIMAL WELFARE

The 2nd OIE Global Conference on Animal Welfare "Putting the OIE Standards to Work" was held in October 2008 in Cairo (Egypt). The first such conference was held in Paris in 2004. More than 400 participants, who came from all OIE regions and from all relevant sectors, including government, producers and transformation sectors, academia, research and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), strongly endorsed the fundamental importance of the active involvement of Veterinary Services and veterinarians for improving animal welfare. The most important outcome of the conference was the identification of key needs and tools to help OIE Members to strengthen their capacities, including relevant elements of infrastructure, to implement the OIE standards.

Proceedings of the conference are available in a trilingual publication: Animal Welfare 'Putting the OIE standards to work', OIE & EU; Ed. 2011 (see OIE online bookshop) and online at http://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Conferences_Events/sites/A_AW2008/home.htm

Depopulation and animal welfare

BSE, foot and mouth disease and avian influenza crises filled our screens with images of thousands of animals killed for disease control purposes.

Depopulation is used to help prevent the spread of infection to healthy animals (and some diseases threaten human health). It must be done under appropriate conditions.

The OIE standards for the slaughter of animals including birds recommend methods that avoid unnecessary pain and suffering in animals.

The Use of Animals in Research and Education
At the OIE 78th General Assembly (2010) Terrestrial Code Chapter 7.8 on the "Use of Animals in Research and Education was unanimously adopted by the 178 OIE Members.

Extract from Adopted Chapter 7.8:

" Most scientists and members of the public agree that the animals should only be used when necessary, ethically justified (thereby avoiding unnecessary duplication of animal based research); and when no other alternative methods, not using live animals, are available; that the minimum number of animals should be used to achieve the scientific or educational goals; and that such use of animals should cause as little pain and/or distress as possible. In addition, animal suffering is often recognised separately from pain and distress and should be considered alongside any lasting harm which is expected to be caused to animals."

WORK IN PROGRESS

Guidelines on Stray Dog Population Control

Stray dogs pose serious human health, socio-economic, political, environmental and animal welfare problems in many countries of the world, and especially in developing countries. Over 50,000 children die each year worldwide from rabies contracted through a bite of a stray dog. The OIE recognised the importance of providing guidance to members on humane methods of stray dog population control and decided to develop specific animal welfare standards. In 2009 at the OIE 77th General Assembly, the Guidelines on Stray Dog Population Control were unanimously adopted by OIE Members.

Stunning and killing of farmed fish for human consumption

A new Aquatic Code Chapter (7.3) on *Stunning and killing of farmed fish for human consumption* was unanimously adopted by the 178 OIE Members at the OIE 78th General Assembly (2010). Future work will address humane killing of farmed fish for disease control purposes.

Livestock Production Systems

Work on animal welfare in livestock production systems is well underway, with broiler chickens and beef cattle as the first livestock production systems to be addressed. In accordance with the approach supported by 178 OIE Members, the draft standards use criteria based on the animal (eg the number of lame animals in a flock) as an indicator rather than on the adoption of standards relating to the design of the production system (eg the design of housing). New standards will be submitted for adoption as early as May 2011. Future priorities include dairy cattle and pigs.

A major step forward:

Development and updating of veterinary legislation

Following the OIE 2nd Global Conference in Cairo, several OIE Members, some of which have not previously had national legislation on animal welfare, are working to develop new appropriate legislation and regulation.

Work in progress

- Animal welfare in livestock production systems

Priorities

- Inclusion of animal welfare in veterinary education

In the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code (2011)

Section 7:

- Transport of animals by sea
 - Transport of animals by land
 - Transport of animals by air
 - Slaughter of animals
 - Killing of animals for disease control purposes
 - Stray dog population control
 - Use of animal in research and education
- <http://www.oie.int/en/international-standard-setting/terrestrial-code/access-online/>

In the OIE Aquatic Animal Health Code (2011)

Section 7:

- Welfare of farmed fish during transport
 - Welfare aspects of stunning and killing of farmed fish for human consumption
- <http://www.oie.int/en/international-standard-setting/aquatic-code/access-online/>