

Drivers for animal welfare policies in Europe

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Summary

The European region has been, and remains, a global leader in the development of animal welfare policies. The region has a great diversity of cultures and religions, different levels of socio-economic development, and varied legislation, policies and practices. Nevertheless, there are common drivers for animal welfare policy based on a history of animal welfare ethics and obligations to animal users and society in general. A unifying goal of countries in the region is to achieve sustainable compliance with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) standards on animal health and welfare. Ethics is the overarching driver, supported by the actions of governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental activities, markets and trade, science and knowledge. Historically, organisations involved in promoting animal welfare have tended to act in isolation. For example, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have run campaigns to influence retailers and the welfare policies of their farmer suppliers. Increasingly, different organisations with common or complementary goals are working together. For example, competent authorities, inter-governmental bodies and NGOs have combined their efforts to address dog population control across several countries in the region. Also, animal welfare is becoming integrated into the corporate social responsibility targets of private companies. Science and knowledge, as drivers and tools, are assisting with the harmonisation of welfare standards, e.g. by providing a common basis for measuring welfare impacts through animal-based measures and widespread sharing of this information. Current trends suggest that there will be greater collaboration among the organisations driving change, and increasing convergence of animal welfare strategies and welfare assessment tools. The result will be increased harmonisation of animal welfare standards throughout the region.

Keywords

Animal welfare – Driver collaboration – Ethics – Europe – Harmonisation – Knowledge sharing – Legislation – Policy – Trade.

Background

The European region of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) comprises 53 Member Countries. It includes the Member States of the European Union (EU), which have led the world in the development of animal welfare policies. The region has a great diversity of cultures and religions, different levels of socio-economic development, and varied legislation, policies and practices. Thus, it is not surprising that there are 'contrasting levels of implementation of animal welfare policies in national legislation', as recognised at the 25th Conference of the OIE Regional Commission

for Europe (1). While there is variation in policy implementation, it is likely that the range of policy drivers is similar across nations (2, 3). The strong trade in animal products within the European region adds to the need for harmonisation of welfare policies.

This paper will consider the plurality of factors influencing European animal welfare policy, beginning with the central and overarching role of ethics in its genesis. By 'policy' the authors mean 'a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organisation or individual' (oxforddictionaries.com).

Ethics and religious practices

The ethics of animal use (4) are the fundamental driver underpinning our interactions with animals and the development of welfare policy.

A prominent example of this is expressed in the EU's Treaty of Lisbon, which came into force in December 2009. In particular, Article 13 states that:

'In formulating and implementing the Union's [...] policies, the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals, while respecting the legislative or administrative provisions and customs of the Member States relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage.'

The concept of sentience is gaining wider acceptance in driving the policies of both governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on animal welfare (e.g. the World Society for the Protection of Animals is calling for a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare [5]).

Religious practices are also influential in shaping developments in animal welfare. For example, a paper by the OIE Animal Welfare Working Group identified requirements of Islamic law that relate to the humane handling of animals, including during transport and at slaughter, and their compatibility with OIE animal welfare standards (6).

While animal protection statutes in government constitutions or legislation, or religious practices, are critical in improving animal welfare standards, statutes alone are unlikely to be successful. Trade, science, knowledge and the initiatives of NGOs and industry all have a part to play in creating an environment for change and in the development of implementation tools to assure effective application of policies. Public health concerns (e.g. zoonoses) are sometimes combined with ethical concerns (e.g. dog population management) to drive welfare policy.

Governmental and inter-governmental activities

Animal welfare policy in the European Union

Animal welfare policy in Europe has a long history. The Council of Europe initiated work on it in the 1960s, when the first Convention for the Protection of Animals (which concerned international transport) was developed and adopted. Four Conventions followed: two on farm animals

(1976 and 1979); one on animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes (1986); and one on pets (1987). The Conventions on Farm Animals were adopted by a number of European countries (both inside and outside the EU) and a variety of measures were developed to implement the recommendations (7). The Conventions provided the platform for the main legislation on the protection of farm animals within the EU.

In addition to legislation (and associated enforcement), key tools identified for implementing the welfare goals are training, welfare measurement, and provision of information to consumers. These measures will enable consumers to take account of animal welfare factors and benefit from competitiveness in the marketplace. Thus, markets and consumers will be able to recognise animal welfare as adding value. In addition, in recognition of the global reach of animal welfare, international collaboration will facilitate implementation (EU 2012–2015 Animal Welfare Strategy) (8).

Animal welfare initiatives in Europe: OIE standards and inter-agency collaboration

The animal welfare situation in Europe varies, particularly between EU and non-EU countries. Three seminars for OIE National Focal Points for Animal Welfare were held in the region (2009, 2012 and 2013) to achieve a more homogeneous implementation of OIE standards, and animal welfare was included in the 25th Conference of the OIE Regional Commission for Europe (2012) (1). At the 2012 meeting for National Focal Points for Animal Welfare, which was held in Kiev, three priority topics were identified: land transport, slaughter and stray dog population control. Welfare at slaughter is important across the region, while land transport is important for livestock travelling between the EU and eastern countries (e.g. Russia, Kazakhstan); dog population control, which has both ethical and public health dimensions, is a prominent issue in several EU and non-EU countries. Several agencies collaborate to address dog control issues: the OIE (e.g. through the development of standards); the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (e.g. through the coorganisation of an expert meeting on dog population management held in Banna, Italy, in 2011); Competent Authorities; and the European Commission (EC). The EC assists EU partner countries and NGOs to address the issue by funding projects and providing technical assistance. For example, it funds the CALLISTO project (Companion Animals Multisectorial Interprofessional Interdisciplinary Strategic Think Tank on Zoonoses) (www.callistoproject.eu) and the TAIEX programme (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange). The TAIEX programme, which is funded by the Directorate-General for Enlargement, supports countries in the application and enforcement of EU

legislation. Joint initiatives between NGOs and research institutions, supported by the EC and the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe, are also in progress (e.g. CAROdog; www.carodog.eu).

The OIE provides the key route to implementing harmonisation of welfare standards throughout the region via its international standards (9, 10). Although the standards are not compulsory, they are gaining in importance, e.g. they have been taken into account in drafting new EU legislation, such as Council Regulation 1099/2009 on the Protection of Animals at the Time of Killing (11). Further evidence of the importance of the OIE standards is demonstrated by the development of technical specifications for global standards by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), with the two organisations having signed a Memorandum of Understanding to manage their overall relationship (12).

Non-governmental organisations

There is a large and increasing number of NGOs actively campaigning in Europe on animal welfare, on the basis of varying ethical principles. Much of the activity has focused on intensively housed production animals, but there is also particular concern about the treatment of stray dogs. The less radical groups, such as those under the umbrella of the EuroGroup for Animals (eurogroupforanimals.org), have a variety of policies and tools to implement change, including information-sharing, marketing welfare-assured products and dialogue with relevant industries and regulatory bodies. The tactics of these groups include the development of private standards; for example, in the United Kingdom (UK), the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has developed animal welfare standards for food animals ('Freedom Food', www.freedomfood.co.uk) and an associated welfare assurance scheme, AssureWel (www.assurewel.org). Other tools include publishing supermarket ratings based on the welfare status of animals used in their supply chains. A related and new initiative by two UK-based NGOs (Compassion in World Farming and the World Society for the Protection of Animals), called the Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare (www.bbfa.com), has the potential to drive standards higher throughout Europe and further afield (see Trade section, below).

Public versus private standards

There is growing awareness, particularly at the OIE, of a disconnection between public (governmental or inter-governmental) welfare standards and those developed in the private sector (13). Private schemes are not harmonised, but may be more responsive to consumer demands, whereas

the public standards place a greater emphasis on scientific evidence (14). Private standards can be a useful aid in the implementation of public standards, and thus an important driver of change (13). The OIE is keen to work closely with the developers of private and public standards to achieve greater compatibility with the OIE standards (14). Activities in Europe to improve control posts for long-distance transport demonstrate how public and private standards can be integrated through certification schemes to achieve good welfare (www.controlpost.eu).

Market/trade drivers and the concept of equivalence

For several years, animal welfare has been emerging as a significant international public policy issue. Many European retailers have embraced and promoted animal welfare to differentiate themselves from competitors. As consumer awareness of the issue continues to rise, the demand for more high-welfare products grows, giving producers who maintain high standards a potential competitive advantage. An example from Europe is Coop Italia, the largest supermarket chain in Italy, which has eliminated eggs from caged layer hens from its stores, along with other initiatives.

Animal welfare and international trade have been the subject of considerable political debate; the issue has been promoted by the EU during agricultural negotiations at the World Trade Organization (15), but it is not purely a European issue. At present there are several multilateral fora that could be used as models for the rapid implementation of animal welfare requirements in farming, transport and slaughter systems at international level. Cooperation among countries appears to be best achieved by including animal welfare in bilateral agreements. For example, in recent years, the EC has sought to strengthen bilateral technical cooperation on animal welfare with a number of trading partners. This is aimed at achieving international awareness of animal protection and actively contributing to the development of standards at international level, while respecting the ethical and cultural dimensions of the issue.

The EU is a major importer of meat products from within the greater European region. Products imported from third countries are not treated differently from those produced in the internal market. However, as a result of consumer preferences, the EU demands that certain conditions be met by the third countries. In particular, from 1 January 2013, countries wishing to import meat into the EU must demonstrate that their standards on the killing of animals are equivalent to those of EU countries, i.e. equivalent to the standards laid out in Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009 (16). Third countries are not obliged to adopt identical

requirements, but those adopted must achieve the same outcomes. Science is important in providing evidence of equivalency; the development and application of animal-based measures (ABMs) (see Science section, below) is crucial in this regard. The present system has been proven to work effectively over the past 15 years and many third countries have responded favourably to these requirements, not only by observing these standards but also by developing their own legislation along the same lines. The OIE international standards are referred to in Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009 as a tool for establishing equivalency; this demonstrates that the standards can be influential in a trading environment.

Science

New developments in science can drive policy and provide tools for policy implementation, e.g. ways to measure welfare outcomes using ABMs (17). Traditional policy instruments have relied heavily on specifying inputs to animal management processes, which makes it extremely difficult to specify appropriate standards in widely varying environments and animal management systems. By focusing on outcomes, policies can be developed to achieve the desired levels of welfare while allowing managers the flexibility to adapt to local conditions. The European Food Safety Authority is playing a key role in evaluating the utility of ABMs and calling for further evaluation of their validity, economic viability and practical implications (17, 18). The EU-funded Animal Welfare Indicators project (www.animal-welfare-indicators.net) is currently in the process of developing and integrating ABMs, as well as making this information widely available via a science hub (animalwelfarehub.com). The ABMs could be used to demonstrate compliance with the equivalency provisions of EU Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009. Standard-setting agents in the private sector (e.g. Red Tractor Assurance in the UK [19]) and the public sector (e.g. the EC [20]) see the value in measuring welfare outcomes, and policy instruments are being progressively upgraded.

Inter-agency collaboration

There is a growing trend towards increased collaboration for the shaping of animal welfare policies. The Western Balkans Veterinary Network (wbvn.net) is a good model: Competent Authorities, academia and NGOs have united to improve animal welfare in a sub-regional area. Partners from seven countries in the Balkan region (including EU Member Countries, candidate countries and potential Member Countries) have joined with the UK to facilitate the implementation of EU animal welfare regulations.

There have also been new developments in corporate social responsibility (CSR) in private enterprise: private companies are now incorporating animal welfare matters, along with environmental concerns and economic considerations, into their business strategies and practices (21). The welfare component is assessed by a range of measures, including the new tool mentioned above, the Business Benchmark for Farm Animal Welfare. This provides a practical way to empower consumers by providing more transparency and competitiveness, thereby fulfilling an important component of the latest EU strategy.

Knowledge

There is extensive production, sharing and dissemination of knowledge on animal welfare in the European region. Knowledge is a powerful driver of welfare policies and standards, as it raises citizens' expectations of law enforcement and implementation, and encourages individuals and communities to adopt appropriate behaviours. Improved knowledge on the part of consumers influences their choices but also their concerns about how food is produced, thus conditioning market policies and the behaviour of public authorities. Moreover, knowledge can help to prevent the development of extreme views and behaviours. The NGOs are well positioned in the region, alongside European authorities, national governments and international organisations, to assist with knowledge dissemination. In the process, capacity in animal welfare is developed, creating a virtuous cycle for further welfare improvements.

Knowledge assists business operators to better understand their roles and responsibilities and the increased market opportunities, and affects their attitude towards the implementation of animal welfare policies, national Competent Authorities, European institutions, and the OIE. Moreover, markets for higher-welfare products may encourage business operators from non-EU countries to adopt voluntary schemes and encourage their competent authorities to enforce EU legislation and OIE standards. Official veterinarians play a critical role in enforcing the law, and their practical and scientific knowledge is of paramount importance. Their training, in EU and non-EU countries, is assured by the Better Training for Safer Food programme of the EC. This aims at strengthening official Veterinary Services in the areas of food and feed law and animal health and welfare rules (information on all animal welfare training courses developed between 2007 and 2014 is accessible at: www.sancotraining.izs.it). Veterinarians also play a crucial role in the process of revision and approval of the OIE standards on animal welfare. Their level of understanding may significantly influence the process, thus improving the final outcome.

Last, but not least, decision-makers receive a massive amount of information designed to influence their attitudes on animal welfare and affect their decisions. It is important that such information be science-based in order to achieve the best policies.

Future directions

European Union strategy

In recent years, a goal in the EU has been to simplify animal health and welfare policies (8, 22) in order to support more uniform and timely implementation. The use of ABMs is seen as a way of achieving simplified animal welfare norms, as discussed previously. Simplification and increased transparency will encourage competitiveness in the EU food industry by adding economic value to animal welfare. Optimisation of the available resources is another priority for the EU (8). The recently funded AWARE project (Animal Welfare Research in an Enlarged Europe) has the aim of facilitating the integration and efficient utilisation of human and knowledge potential across European countries (www.aware-welfare.eu). Similarly, the Animal Health and Welfare ERA-NET project (ERA-NET projects coordinate research throughout the European Research Area) was launched in 2012 with the aim of joining the efforts of the 19 EU and non-EU participating countries in the funding of projects on animal health and welfare (www.anihwa.eu). A pilot programme to identify the ways in which a network of reference centres on animal welfare could support knowledge dissemination and training is also being explored (www.euwelnet.eu).

Regional strategy

The launch of an OIE Regional Platform on Animal Welfare is planned for early 2014. This tool will provide the basis for the implementation of OIE standards and for collaboration across the European region. The steering group for this platform will cover the entire region, from east to west and from north to south, with representatives from Ireland, Russia, Spain, Serbia and Turkey, as well as delegates from the OIE (Headquarters, Regional Representations and Sub-Regional Representations), the EC, and the OIE Collaborating Centre for Veterinary Training, Epidemiology, Food Safety and Animal Welfare based within the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e del Molise in Teramo. A donor active in the region will also be a member of the steering group. The EC will provide financial support for the initiative, even though it will cover a broader area than the EU. The platform provides further concrete evidence of the benefits of collaboration when seeking to achieve improvements in animal welfare.

In the near future, we are likely to see increasing convergence between EU and non-EU strategies for the benefit of all stakeholders; the OIE can play an important role in this process.



Les moteurs des politiques du bien-être animal en Europe

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Résumé

L'Europe a toujours été à la pointe du développement des politiques du bien-être animal. La région se caractérise par une grande diversité culturelle et religieuse, par un développement socio-économique hétérogène et par des législations, des politiques et des pratiques différenciées. Néanmoins, on constate que les politiques du bien-être animal sont commandées par des facteurs communs, basés sur une tradition d'éthique dans ce domaine et sur la reconnaissance des devoirs incombant aux utilisateurs d'animaux et à la société dans son ensemble. Un objectif fédérateur pour les pays européens consiste à inscrire dans la

durée leur conformité avec les normes de l'Organisation mondiale de la santé animale (OIE) relatives à la santé et au bien-être animal. L'éthique fait figure de levier transversal, soutenu par l'action gouvernementale, intergouvernementale et non gouvernementale, ainsi que par celle des marchés, des partenaires commerciaux, des chercheurs et des experts. Par le passé, les organisations qui avaient vocation à promouvoir le bien-être animal avaient tendance à intervenir de manière isolée. Par exemple, les organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) ont fait campagne pour influencer les choix des distributeurs ainsi que les pratiques de leurs fournisseurs en matière de bien-être animal. Aujourd'hui, la collaboration entre différentes organisations partageant le même but ou ayant des objectifs complémentaires ne cesse de s'accroître. Par exemple, les autorités compétentes, les instances intergouvernementales et les ONG se sont concertées pour travailler ensemble au contrôle des populations de chiens dans plusieurs pays de la région. De même, dans le secteur privé, le bien-être animal devient une composante des objectifs relevant de la « responsabilité sociétale des entreprises ». La science et les connaissances sont des leviers et des outils qui contribuent à harmoniser les normes du bien-être animal, par exemple en fournissant une base commune pour mesurer les effets du bien-être au moyen de mesures axées sur l'animal et en partageant le plus largement possible cette information. Les tendances actuelles vont vers une collaboration accrue entre les organisations qui poussent au changement et vers des convergences plus fortes des stratégies du bien-être animal et des outils d'évaluation de ce même bien-être. Il devrait en résulter une harmonisation croissante des normes du bien-être animal dans toute la région.

Mots-clés

Bien-être animal – Collaboration des acteurs du changement – Commerce – Éthique – Europe – Harmonisation – Législation – Partage des connaissances – Politique.



Motores de las políticas de bienestar animal en Europa

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Resumen

La región de Europa ha estado y sigue estando a la vanguardia del mundo en la formulación de políticas de bienestar animal. La región alberga una gran diversidad de culturas y religiones, distintos niveles de desarrollo socioeconómico y diferentes legislaciones, políticas y praxis. Sin embargo, existen motores comunes que impulsan las políticas de bienestar animal, fruto de la historia de la ética en este terreno y de las obligaciones que existen con quienes utilizan animales y con la sociedad en general. Un objetivo que federa a los países de la región es el de dar cumplimiento duraderamente a las normas de la Organización Mundial de Sanidad Animal (OIE) en materia de sanidad y bienestar de los animales. La ética, que es el motor supremo, se acompaña de la acción

de instancias gubernamentales, intergubernamentales y no gubernamentales, los mercados y el comercio, la ciencia y el conocimiento. Históricamente, las entidades de protección de los animales han tendido a trabajar en solitario. Ciertas organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONG), por ejemplo, han realizado campañas para influir en los minoristas y en las políticas de bienestar de los ganaderos que los abastecían. Ahora, cada vez más, distintas organizaciones con objetivos comunes o complementarios trabajan conjuntamente. Por ejemplo, autoridades competentes, organismos intergubernamentales y ONG han aunado esfuerzos para abordar el control de la población canina en varios países de la región al mismo tiempo. Además, el bienestar animal empieza a formar parte de los objetivos de responsabilidad social empresarial del sector privado. La ciencia y el conocimiento, siendo a la vez motor y herramienta, contribuyen a la armonización de las normas de bienestar, por ejemplo sentando bases comunes para medir la incidencia en el bienestar de uno u otro parámetro gracias a la medición de determinadas características del animal y al intercambio generalizado de esta información. Las actuales tendencias parecen apuntar a una colaboración más estrecha entre las organizaciones que impulsan el cambio, así como a una creciente convergencia entre las herramientas de evaluación del bienestar animal y las estrategias en la materia, todo lo cual redundará en un mayor grado de armonización de las normas de bienestar animal en toda la región.

Palabras clave

Armonización – Bienestar animal – Colaboración entre actores del cambio – Comercio – Ética – Europa – Intercambio de conocimientos – Legislación – Política.



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