GCAW

Global Coalition for Animal Welfare

Knowledge Share

The Global Coalition for Animal Welfare: Our Approach

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GCAW APPROACH TO ANIMAL WELFARE

The Global Coalition for Animal Welfare is a targeted, action-oriented, multi-stakeholder platform that brings together members of the global food supply chain to develop and implement an industry roadmap for improving the welfare of animals raised for food.

This document incorporates current animal welfare science and the expertise and experience of GCAW members. It positions good animal welfare as an outcome of good animal care. It presents a set of six aims for animal care that, taken together, have the potential to provide good animal welfare outcomes. They do not necessarily describe current animal care practice. The aims represent an agreed approach to improving welfare and not a set of prescriptive commitments that members are expected to adopt.

This document supports GCAW's objective to develop an industry roadmap for improving the welfare of animals raised for food. It provides a basis for GCAW to engage on this issue with the wider food industry and its stakeholders.

The Global Coalition for Animal Welfare (GCAW) is aligned with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) in its definition of animal welfare. This definition is widely accepted by the global food supply chain and its relevant stakeholders, including food companies and primary producers, industry associations, international governmental organizations, local and regional governments, investors, animal welfare NGO's and others:

> *An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress.*
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> *Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate shelter, management, nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter/killing.*
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> *Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal (that is, how it is coping with its environment); the treatment that an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment.*[1]

GCAW sees that there is an ethical imperative to work to improve animal welfare and recognises that there is a need to focus not only on avoiding negative welfare states, but also on promoting positive welfare states.

We recognise the animal welfare aims stated within this definition are interconnected. An animal cannot be said to be in a good state of welfare if it can express its innate behaviour but is injured, poorly nourished or experiencing pain, fear or distress or, conversely, healthy, safe and well-nourished but not able to express innate behaviour.

As primary caregivers, the skill, knowledge, attitude, and behaviour of farmers, ranchers, and stock persons profoundly impact the welfare outcomes of animals in their care. Many animal care practices that are now regarded as welfare issues, such as invasive procedures, were adopted by farmers to reduce negative welfare impacts associated with raising animals for production. As animal welfare science has developed and reveals more

[1] Article 7.1.1. Terrestrial Animal Health Code. World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

about the importance of meeting the behavioural needs of farm animals, stakeholder expectations about animal care and welfare continue to change.

GCAW recognizes that good animal welfare outcomes can be achieved in a variety of production systems. As such, the Coalition is focussed on continuous improvement in animal welfare outcomes and recognises the need to seek alternatives for the key animal care practices that can compromise an animal's welfare and promote the enhancements that can positively impact welfare.

GCAW AIMS FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

Commercial animal production systems are complex and varied. The animal care practices listed below are interconnected. Changing one animal care practice can impact the welfare outcomes of others and may require changes in others.

BREED

Animals should be bred for good health and good welfare outcomes as well as good productivity.

Good animal care starts by selecting animals based on a balance of good health, good welfare outcomes and good productivity. Continuous improvement in welfare outcome measures should be a focus of any animal breeding programme. Areas of focus should include, but are not limited to, good skeletal and cardiovascular health, decreased rates of injury and disease and improved social behaviour and low mortality.

HOUSING

Housing systems should be designed and maintained to provide animals with a comfortable environment and to allow animals to express species-specific behaviour. They should provide sufficient space and an appropriate stocking density to allow animals to stand, stretch, and turn around and for all animals to be able to lie down all at the same time. Housing should be designed for ease of management and be well maintained to reduce stress and prevent injuries and disease.

Animals should be able to interact with others (except where isolated for medical reasons). Animals should be provided sufficient space to encourage species-specific behaviours and prevent competition for feed and water, aggression, stress and abnormal behaviour. Air quality, temperature, humidity and noise should be maintained at a comfortable level to help reduce stress.

Animals should be kept in enriched environments that enable normal species-specific behaviour, reduce abnormal behaviour (such as tail biting, bar biting) and contribute to positive mental and physical states.

HUSBANDRY

Animals should be handled in a calm manner using low-stress handling methods. Positive interactions between animals and humans should be encouraged whenever possible. Animals should be inspected regularly to facilitate positive, low-stress interactions and to identify health and welfare problems. Animal handlers should be proficient in good stockmanship, appropriate to the production system, and trained in handling techniques that do not evoke fear in livestock.

Where possible, alternatives to invasive procedures that cause pain and stress (such as tail docking, teeth clipping and castration) should be used. Invasive procedures are used to reduce injuries for animals and handlers, meet market requirements and prevent or reduce pain and injury caused by abnormal behaviours. While invasive procedures can reduce injuries, they do not address the causes of abnormal behaviour. Animal care practices and management systems that minimize abnormal behaviours should be adopted, such as changes in breeding, housing and husbandry. Where invasive procedures are deemed necessary for the safety and welfare of the animals or

their handlers, they should be performed by trained personnel and the animals should be provided sedation and/or effective pain control, where suitable drugs are available.

Animals should be well-nourished. They should be provided a sufficient quality and quantity of feed and clean, potable water to meet their physiological and psychological needs and prevent prolonged hunger, thirst, malnutrition or dehydration. Feeding regimes should be designed to reduce the experience of hunger, such as by providing animals with high fibre feeds. Feed and water should be provided in a way that minimizes competition and aggression.

HEALTH

Good health is fundamental to good welfare. Sick or injured animals must be treated as soon as possible to alleviate pain and distress. Sick or injured animals that cannot be treated should be humanely euthanised as soon as possible.

Where appropriate, sick or injured animals that may benefit from treatment should be segregated from other animals in a sick or hospital pen. Clinical endpoints[2] and decision trees should be developed to ensure that new-born non-viable animals, sick or injured animals that do not respond to treatment and sick or injured animals for which treatment is not appropriate are humanely euthanized using appropriate procedures. Personnel that perform on-farm euthanasia should be trained and competent in the procedure. Animals should be confirmed dead before disposal.

Animal health plans for preventing, treating and controlling disease should be developed in consultation with a veterinarian and should include biosecurity and quarantine protocols. Good record keeping can assist in managing health and welfare problems.

Antibiotics are used in animal production to treat and cure sick animals (therapeutic use), to control disease from spreading from one group of animals to other groups (metaphylactic use), and to prevent disease or sickness in a group of otherwise healthy animals (prophylactic use). Prophylactic use of antibiotics may be reduced or eliminated through implementing an animal health plan that emphasizes preventative animal care practices.

Hormonal, antibiotic or other synthetic growth promoters should not be used.

TRANSPORT

Animals should only be transported if deemed fit to travel. Animals not fit for travel, such as non-ambulatory animals, should be humanely euthanized on farm. The catching, handling and loading of animals should be done in a calm manner using low-stress handling methods appropriate to the species' specific behaviour. Electric goads or prods should not be used to move animals. Where feasible, animals should be transported in the same groups that they have been housed. The mixing of unfamiliar animals should be avoided.

The duration of live animal transport should be minimized. Where animals are transported over long distances, feed and water should be provided at appropriate intervals. Feed and water should be provided in a manner that limits competition and aggression. Animals should be monitored regularly throughout the journey.

Animals should be transported in a way that minimizes stress through good truck design, handling, appropriate stocking densities and group composition, limited duration of transport, and adapting transport to account for extreme weather conditions.

[2] Examples of clinical endpoints include – Severe lameness, fractured legs, unable to eat or drink, severe body weight loss of 20% or greater.

SLAUGHTER

Animals should be handled, restrained, rendered unconscious until death, and slaughtered using humane methods operated by competent, trained personnel.

Holding facilities (lairages) should be designed and maintained to prevent injuries, minimise stress, protect animals from extreme weather and allow adequate space for animals to stand up, move around and lie down. Where animals are provided feed and water in lairage, this should be provided in a way that minimises competition and aggression. The mixing of unfamiliar animals should be avoided.