



ANIMAL WELFARE: POLICY AND ISSUES

**Sandeep Dhillod^{1*}, Ramswaroop Suthar²,
Vishal Sharma¹ and Man Singh¹**

¹Department of Livestock Production Management,
LUVAS, Hisar (Haryana)

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INTRODUCTION

Animal well-being, which includes both physical and mental health, is referred to as animal welfare. The goal of this multidisciplinary profession is to guarantee that animals do not endure needless pain by utilizing knowledge from veterinary medicine, ethics, legislation, and animal behavior. Recent decades have seen a substantial evolution of the idea due to changes in legislation, scientific study, and public concern.

THE FIVE FREEDOMS

The UK's Farm Animal Welfare Council created the Five Freedoms in 1979, and they serve as the cornerstone of contemporary animal welfare. These liberties are now widely accepted as a standard by which to measure the wellbeing of animals:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from discomfort;
3. Freedom from pain, injury, or disease;
4. Freedom to express normal behavior;
5. Freedom from fear and distress.
6. Globally, laws, animal husbandry procedures, and welfare evaluations are guided by these concepts.

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SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES ON WELFARE

Both physiological and behavioral indices are used in the scientific assessment of animal wellbeing. Heart rate, immunological function, and stress hormones like cortisol are examples of physiological indicators. Signs of discomfort, such as avoidance behaviors, lack of social engagement, or stereotypes (repeated, aimless activity), might be behavioral indications.

The focus of contemporary welfare science is on the value of pleasant experiences rather than just the lack of bad ones. Play, social connection, and environmental enrichment are all encouraged in this strategy, which is referred to as the "positive welfare" paradigm.



LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Enforcement of animal welfare is mostly dependent on legislation. Animals are recognized as sentient beings in the European Union by the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, which mandates that governments "pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals". Farm animals are not covered under the Animal Welfare Act, which governs how animals are treated in research, display, and transportation in the US.

Advanced welfare regulations have been passed in nations like Sweden and New Zealand, with the latter being the first to formally acknowledge animal consciousness in 2015.

WELFARE IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Farm Animals

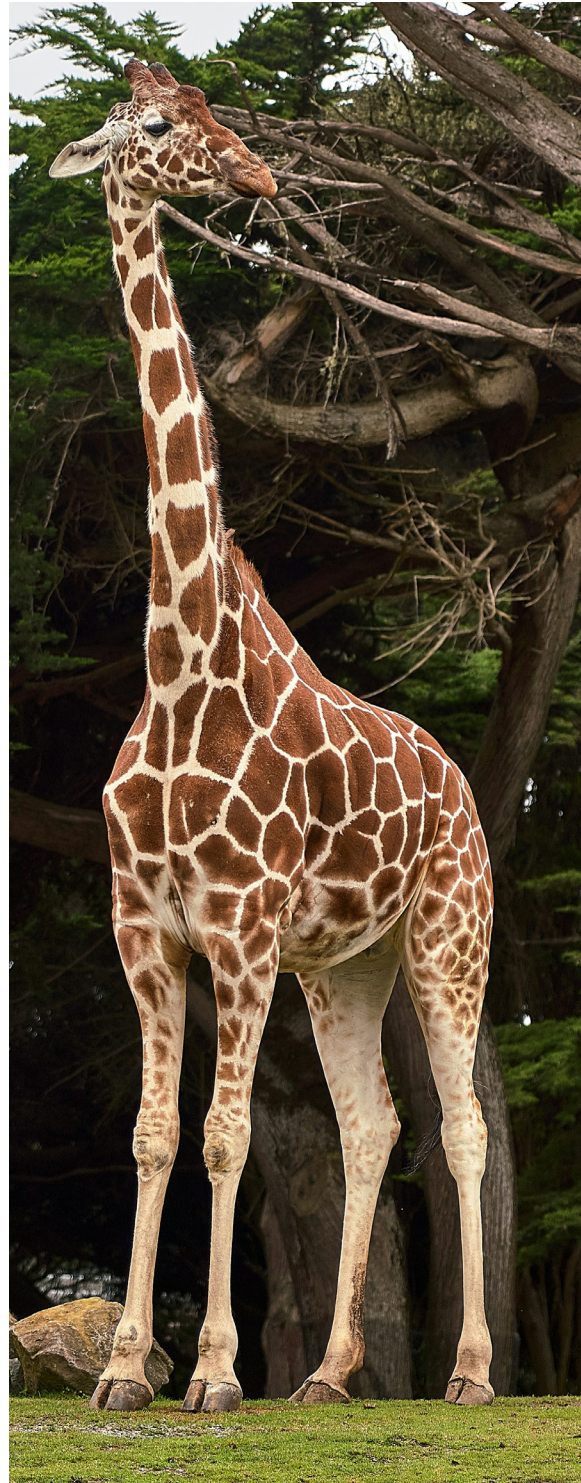
Many people have criticized industrial agriculture for putting production ahead of wellbeing. There is criticism that some practices, including as battery cages, tail docking, and gestation boxes, violate the natural behaviors of animals. Nonetheless, consumer demand and moral considerations are driving the adoption of welfare-friendly systems like enhanced housing and pasture-based farming.

Companion Animals

Pet welfare takes behavior, environment, and health care into account. As evidenced by the increase of breed-specific health problems and overcrowded shelters, overbreeding and abandonment are serious problems.

Wildlife and Zoos

Concerns like habitat degradation, poaching, and conflict between humans and wildlife are all part of wildlife welfare. Whether confinement can actually address the diverse requirements of wild animals is a topic of ongoing ethical controversy in zoos. Strict welfare requirements are now enforced by accrediting organizations like as the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.



ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Animal rights and animal welfare are frequently contrasted. Rights proponents argue against the use of animals for human purposes completely, whereas welfare supporters seek to reduce suffering and enhance circumstances (Regan, 2004). This conceptual difference influences consumer behavior, activism, and policy.



FUTURE

Animal welfare is changing as a result of innovation and technology. Sensors are used in precision cattle husbandry to track behavior and health, allowing for early intervention. Furthermore, rising ethical concerns are reflected in the public's interest in plant-based diets and cultured meat, which might drastically cut down on the number of animals bred for sustenance.



CONCLUSION

The dynamic and important topic of animal welfare touches on public policy, ethics, and science. In addition to helping animals, ensuring humane treatment of animals also improves human health, environmental sustainability, and social ethics. The obligation to treat all sentient beings with compassion and responsibility increases with awareness.

