

AnimalhealthEurope position: EU Animal Welfare legislation

Animal health and welfare are closely interconnected. It is a well-known fact that animal health is a prerequisite for animal welfare as clearly recognised in the Five Domains of Animal Welfare. We support the Five Domains, an evolution from the widely recognised Five Freedoms, and now recognised by international bodies including the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

Purely welfare-oriented attention on farms – such as access to outdoor space or the ability to express natural behaviour – is not sufficient without close attention to health, as ensuring holistic care that guarantees high levels of animal welfare will largely depend on the farming method and the keeper's knowledge.

It's important therefore that the new EU rules on animal welfare ensure that provisions are made to improve animal health and welfare hand-in-hand.

Inclusive legislation, workable for all

It is important that the legislation remains flexible and adapted to the precise need at the given time, with a feasible transition period while being future-ready enough to allow diversity and innovation in farming methods.



The role of the animal health industry

We believe that food and farming choices are personal decisions, and advocate ways in which we can support further improvements in animal welfare through holistic animal health care. For this reason, we see our role as mainly developing solutions and supporting improvements in breeding and keeping of farm animals and companion animals.

When it comes to the breeding and keeping of animals we recognise that different animals have different needs. Medicines are often adapted to the specific health need of an animal and not used across the board, and the same should apply when it comes to welfare practices. We would therefore welcome the development of species-specific rules, and particularly look forward to the development of specific rules for companion animals, not yet existing in EU law.

Animal health visits and well-established preventive medicine plans are essential for maintaining animal welfare, but animals can still get sick even if all precautions are taken. Maintaining animal health is essential for animal welfare. For example:



sedatives, anaesthetics and pain killers remain extremely important for pigs and other animals who undergo surgical interventions. These help to avoid pain and discomfort as well as stress.



some diseases in cows can lead to them being unable to stand, causing pain and injury, and restricting ability to express natural behaviours. Medicines are essential for treating these diseases before they lead to downer cow syndrome, which can be fatal.



a simple vaccination is extremely important in the case of diseases that are normally lethal. Tetanus causes heightened sensitivity and muscle spasms, which can be dangerous for horses and their handlers, and in foals the disease can take as little as three days before death.



easy-to-use protection against parasites can be a life-saver for dogs and other animals, as diseases such as heartworm disease can cause severe lung disease and, external parasites, like ticks and flies cause, at the very least, great discomfort and stress to all animals.

A happy and healthy life for companion animals

Advances in health care solutions for companion animals have greatly developed over the last decade and pets are now living longer than before. There is also a steady increase in the number of households keeping a pet, with 90 million households in Europe today. The new legislation should keep in mind such advances in order to ensure future-proof rules.

We believe there should be provisions to ensure both responsible breeding and responsible keeping. This should include elements such as regular veterinary check-ups, recommendations for vaccination, recommendations on spaying and neutering, and recommendations for registration and identification.

- ID microchips should come from recognised manufacturers and there is a need to look to how the EU can support interoperability of databases across the bloc, in particular when it comes to travel with pets.
- National animal health guidelines should apply for vaccination, parasite control, end of life care, etc.
- Digitalisation of the EU Pet Passport interconnected with the register of breeding establishments under the EU Animal Health Law should be considered.
- There should be a framework for the regulation of online marketing of companion animals, with established checking systems (e.g. VeriPet) to protect both those purchasing animals from online sellers and the animals themselves. This is important to avoid disease incursion into the EU via undocumented or illegally transported animals.

Ensuring on-farm animal health and welfare

As the Fitness Check demonstrated, current legislation has been poorly enforced in some areas. We would welcome a proposal which focuses on provisions that are easily enforceable and that can be measured and/or reported on. We believe the proposal should allow for a diverse range of farming systems and embrace potential for innovations in farming methods such as Precision Livestock Farming.

- Health and welfare should be supported through regular animal health checks as advised under the EU Animal Health Law. The veterinarian should play a central role serving as an advisor for farmers.
- We would welcome greater transparency supported by the application of innovative animal health monitoring technologies, alongside the establishment of a code of conduct or agreements on data sharing.
- Continued access to animal health solutions should be assured, including: vaccines, parasite control, NSAIDs, antimicrobials, digital solutions, anaesthetics and analgesics, etc. Recognition of their role in improving animal welfare should be demonstrated by avoiding provisions that restrict their use (with the exception of antimicrobials listed on the reserve list in EU Regulation 2019/6)
- A transition period should be established that takes into account time for adaptation, time for training and should be accompanied by financial support.
- Recognition should be accorded for farming practices that go beyond EU standards, e.g. within the animal welfare labelling framework.
- Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) should be established to support the transition, stimulate learning and encourage sharing of best practices.

Humane conditions and transparency during transport and slaughter

We support rules that ensure transport is carried out in the best conditions for the humane transport of live animals with the least stress. We believe digital animal health monitoring technologies alongside recommended pre-transport vaccination can support in the areas of fitness for transport, health and welfare during transport, and transparency on requirements.

Practices for slaughter of animals should ensure the respect of animals and value their contribution to the provision of our food. Slaughter should be done under humane conditions with regular checks to ensure transparency.

Voluntary animal welfare labelling under an established framework

The existence of multiple voluntary initiatives should be recognised and elements should feed into the development of an overarching framework taking on existing measurements, etc. It is important that adequate compensation is accorded to those investing in ensuring higher standards. We believe the legislation should not favour one type of farming over another, and the labelling framework should be seen as a reward system for those who are doing more for animal welfare. It is imperative that farmers who need to use antibiotics to treat a sick animal should not see their products de facto excluded from a welfare labelling scheme.

In short

Good animal health is an essential element not only for good animal welfare but also for sustainable farming practices and the continued supply of safe food. Good companion animal health also supports human well-being and protects people from diseases that are shared between people and animals.

A farmer's, keeper's or other animal guardian's commitment to preventing animal diseases, preventing stress and ensuring a humane life can be supported by ensuring access to all animal health solutions.



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