

Animal welfare: how it is talked about.

The scientist **David Fraser** in 2003 defined three different views of animal welfare that can be defined in relation:

1. to biological functioning,
2. to the affective state
3. to natural life.

Different groups of people have different views. For example, the **American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)** in 2022 states that an animal is in a good state of wellbeing if (indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well fed, safe, able to express innate behaviour and if it does not experience pain, fear and distress, and the **WOAH (World Organisation for Animal Health)** definition is on the same page (Bullar et al, 2018; UN, 2016; WOA, 2023). These are combinations of the first two views.

Then there are those who consider well-being to be that which comes close to their interpretation of natural life. For these people, an animal should be outdoors, without considering that in this situation it could be threatened/scared/eaten by a predator or find itself in conditions of excessive heat or intense cold.

The concept of natural living was applied, for example, to '**Heck**' cattle imported into a natural area near Amsterdam, Oostvaardersplassen in the Netherlands. When the cattle became too numerous, the managers of Oostvaardersplassen intended to selectively cull the oldest and weakest animals to keep the population at a sustainable level in the area - but enraged citizens brought in hay, alarmed the press, including national radio and TV, and questions from the Partij voor de Dieren (Party for the Animals, <https://www.partijvoordedieren.nl/vragen/vragen-vestering-over-het-afschieten-van-grote-grazers-in-de-oostvaardersplassen>) were raised in Parliament. This example highlights how different the interpretation of welfare is between those who work with nature and citizens who observe nature, believing themselves to be attentive to it but not having a close relationship with it.

Over time, the Five Freedoms (indicated by the FAWC -Farm Animal Welfare Council as the ideal to strive for) and the Three Essentials of Animal Welfare (defining the importance of the animal keeper's role in animal welfare (FAWC, 2007)) have also become well recognised ideals.

Welfare Quality[®] (2023) has also developed a framework to describe the welfare of farm animals, and we have the Five Domains where alongside the avoidance of negative experiences, Alongside the avoidance of negative experiences, there trend toward also a focus on positive experiences. FAWC have described animal sentience (2019), and frameworks with positive experiences were developed by Welfare Quality[®] (2023) and Mellor et al (1994). The latter is referred to as the Five Domains.

It should be mentioned that human perceptions of animal welfare and human assessment of the importance of animal welfare are naturally influenced by many different factors analysed by multiple scholars and research bodies:

- Cornish in 2016 and Lawrence in 1985 discuss this by pointing to the influence of age, gender, religion, geo-political region, culture of belonging, previous experiences with animals, the 'cuteness' of a species (e.g.: insect or rat vs. giant panda)
- Clucas in 2008 and Dang in 2017 emphasise the difference in approach and consideration between companion or farm animals (Levine et al., 2005),

- (2012) Professor Marian Dawkins of Oxford University says it is dangerous to determine animal welfare in terms of anthropomorphism (thinking you should just open your hearths, and that you do not need any evidence about animal consciousness – just use your kind of intuition, as is often felt by people who are not scientists). Scientists are ignorant about consciousness – it is better to face this than to pretend they have solved what is consciousness and use that as a basis for animal welfare. “There's a lot of new legislation about animal welfare. Unfortunately a lot of it is not evidence-based.” Dawkins 2012 What do animals want Edge discussion

https://www.edge.org/conversation/marian_stamp_dawkins-what-do-animals-want

- Open Philanthropy in 2023 and Puckett and Munshi-South in 2019 make clear the different judgement in relation to money spent on species-focused activism and interpretation of farming systems and practices.

- According to Degeling in 2015, it is not easy to address the issue of farm animal welfare, considered a 'wicked problem', because many aspects are complex in nature and many stakeholders have different interests in decision-making and policy-making.

- For Sinclair in 2022, one of the key principles associated with the success of international animal welfare initiatives is understanding the public and the local context.

Regarding regional influence, in some regions, such as Europe, surveys are frequently conducted among the general public on many issues. These include attitudes towards animal welfare.

The results are used to make cross-country comparisons in order to interpret trends and lead to policy discussions and initiatives such as the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy (Fernandes et al, 2019, EC, 2007, EC, 2016, EC, 2023a,b).

It happens that so-called cognitive biases, which differ from individual to individual and between different aggregated communities, influence the assessment of animal welfare according to prejudices or preferences that have little to do with the reality of the animal. Individuals' judgements tend towards the 'preferences of society as a whole' and it emerges that some species are considered more worthy of attention than others. It can be seen that neglected species are perceived as less charismatic or 'cute' by the public (Gunnthorsdottir, 2001; Martín-López et al., 2009; Colléony et al., 2017; Troudet et al., 2017).

Negative criticism of poultry farms is particularly influenced by:

- The number of animals on farms compared to what people are used to seeing in pets or wild animals.
- The news about bird flu
- The funding supporting social media actors who focus critical remarks on broiler and egg chickens,
- The commercial exploitation (for food)
- The use of the term 'intensive' to describe farms

(Clark et al, 2016, Harper et al, 2001; Meehan et al, 2002; Clark et al, 2019, Estevez et al, 2019, Grunert et al, 2018, Harper & Makatouni, 2002; Sweeney et al, 2022).

The concerns expressed and the reduction in consumption of animal products do not coincide consistently, as in some studies it has been reported that beef and pork consumption is set to decrease while chicken consumption is set to increase, with some variation between countries, although these trends could also be due to health and safety concerns and not just welfare considerations [Clark et al, 2016, McKendree, 2014, Ellis et al, 2009, Harper et al, 2001].

The marketing of wellness concepts

There is an intense debate, among scientists and animal welfare organisations and people who work with animals, about what welfare can be stated on labels. Whether people are really willing to pay for animal welfare when purchasing products is a hot topic in socio-economic research and is expressed as Willingness to Pay (WTP) (Clark et al. 2016; Alonso et al, 2020). This requires the determination of (perceived) welfare elements and the development of labels to put these products on the market allowing farmers to cover the costs they face in adhering to animal welfare verification requirements, costs generated by the fact that, even when animal welfare is in fact respected, it is required to be certified in order to label it... and this generates an additional cost.

According to the International Finance Corporation (IFC), 'higher animal welfare standards are increasingly seen as a prerequisite for improving business efficiency and profitability, meeting international markets and responding to consumer expectations' (IFC, 2014).

The simplest option is to point to facts such as access to the outdoors, natural light, and stocking density as positive elements for welfare and award extra points to systems that have these resources. These measures are resource-based and therefore easily measurable and verifiable, but whether or not they provide increased animal welfare is subject to individual perception and increasingly the subject of debate.

The **IPWA-International Poultry Welfare Alliance** (2023) has developed animal-based key welfare indicators, as welfare intended for the animal should be measurable on the animal itself. In support of this, the Greenwell meat poultry project (de Jong et al., 2022) found that by removing the resource-based measures from their Welfare Score and leaving only the animal-based ones, most of the initial differences between the three systems compared (Beter Leven, Kip van Morgen, Standard) disappeared. The project thus showed that with improved husbandry conditions and breeds used, the main difference between the herds became and remains management.

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