

What Does Good Animal Welfare Look Like?

I remember when my son was little and asked, "How does a chicken become a chicken nugget?" As the son of a veterinarian, he always knew that meat came from animals and that as a veterinarian, it was my job to take the best possible care of those animals before they gave their life for our food. Instilling in him the value that animals had proper nutrition and veterinary care from the day they were born or hatched was very important to me. I made sure he knew that the welfare standards practised on the farm, during transport, and while at the slaughter plant were carried out in an ethical manner.

So many folks, like my son, may find themselves asking "what does good animal welfare look like?" This is a controversial, but important, topic. People come into this discussion with their own points of view, experiences, expertise and expectations. Because of this, we each may view animal welfare differently – and that is ok – as it is the differences that drive those in animal agriculture to continue to make improvements in animal health and welfare. We will give you two different perspectives to answer this question: I grew up around cattle, showed horses in the Midwest, and have spent my career as a poultry veterinarian. Michelle grew up as a city kid who found a career in animal agriculture specialising in animal welfare science in cattle and swine.

There are principles and moral obligations that we all ground ourselves to when ensuring animal health and welfare whether animals are on farm, in transit, or at harvest. These are commonly known as the "Five Freedoms" and they define ideal states of welfare:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury, or disease
- Freedom to express normal behaviour
- Freedom from fear and distress

Let's explore these a bit more and learn what they might mean when livestock caregivers in our food animal production systems strive to achieve these ideal states of welfare for their animals every day.

- **Freedom from hunger and thirst:** This one is probably the easiest to understand. It ensures that animals have ready access to ample fresh water and a diet that will ensure healthy growth and a strong immune system. Diets are formulated for the specific needs of the animals at the different phases of their lives, whether they are young newborns, in the growing phase, mature animals, or experiencing illness.
- **Freedom from discomfort:** This ideal state of welfare ensures that an animal's environment provides them with shelter and a comfortable resting area that is appropriate for the animal being cared for. In modern poultry and swine housing, for instance, we can control the temperature and humidity, making it extremely

comfortable even when the temperatures outside are not. For cattle, we provide adequate room to lay down and socialise, and in many instances provide bedding or flooring to optimise comfort, dry areas to rest, and warmth when needed. Modern housing for livestock can also incorporate fans, windbreaks, sprinklers, and shade to further enhance comfort.

- **Freedom from pain, injury, and disease:** Prevention, control and treatment of disease is a cornerstone of those involved in animal husbandry and caregivers play an important role in prevention and rapid diagnosis for treatment. Involvement of a veterinarian in the care of the animals is critical in safeguarding the health and welfare of animals, as they provide knowledge and oversight on herd and flock health protocols. Training of farm workers for sound animal health, welfare, and handling is a standard practice in modern agriculture as this enables positive human-animal interactions, reduces stress and disease in animals, and promotes safety for both humans and their animals.
- **Freedom to express normal behaviour:** This state of welfare describes providing animals with an environment that enables them to exhibit species-specific behaviours like animals do in their natural environment. This could mean ensuring they have adequate space to move around to socialise and be raised in the appropriate company of an animal's own kind. We often have open pens that allow animals to be housed with other animals that would naturally be found in their flock or herd. And the animals' behavioural interactions are closely monitored by their caretakers to ensure all animals are properly cared for within their environment.
- **Freedom from fear and distress:** This last point ensures that conditions and treatment of animals avoids mental suffering. This means we must care for the animals' mental wellbeing as well as their physical wellbeing. This can be achieved by creating an environment where animals can feel safe and secure. In addition, the human-animal bond is important in achieving this ideal state of welfare. Farm workers should be properly trained to reduce stress and fear when interacting with livestock, such as when moving them between locations, vaccinating or treating them when they are sick, transporting them, or during humane slaughter. It is important that animal caregivers are trained to understand species-specific behaviours to better understand and prepare for how animals may react in different situations.

Michelle talks about these principles and ideal states of welfare to those that didn't grow up on the farm and to share the story of animal agriculture with those that don't get to be around it every day – those city kids like her. To that crowd, she encourages them to find opportunities to connect with livestock farmers and veterinarians, whether it's through social media or through on-farm tours. Meeting livestock caregivers and

seeing for yourself how they work with their animals is very eye-opening and inspiring, because these folks prioritise their animals before everything, sometimes even before their own families. She reminisces about the first day she set foot on a dairy as one she will never forget, because it was the day she saw for herself how livestock science and veterinary medicine put in place numerous practices for how animals (with very specific needs and behaviours) are cared for and housed. Seeing this firsthand – how hard farm workers worked each day in very harsh weather conditions and over long hours just to ensure all animals received the attention they needed. And despite the tough working conditions, these

dairymen exuded the love and joy of being around their animals and caring for them.

Having discussions on what animal welfare should look like may be a difficult topic, but it is a very important one that must be ongoing and action-oriented. We need to have these conversations not only in our production systems, but with consumers and non-agriculture groups as well. Those of us involved in animal agriculture strive to provide the best care possible for domesticated animals that rely on humans for their needs and wellbeing. This is because they provide so much back to our livelihoods and families, and it is the moral obligation of caregivers to provide them with a high-quality life. So, the next time you have the opportunity to engage with a farmer or a veterinarian, ask them how they care for their animals and what good animal welfare looks like to them.



Dr. Sara Steinlage

Currently Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO), Dr. Steinlage focuses on scientific and public policy within poultry and livestock working with various stakeholders to help shape their animal health and welfare policies. Throughout her

career she has worked with broiler customers around the globe in over 20 countries on their health and management programs, and has spoken at the national level on the topic. Prior to being named Elanco Animal Health's CVO, Dr. Steinlage led the company's US team of poultry experts, comprised of veterinarians, nutritionists, and microbiologists. For the first 11 years of her career, she provided broiler technical support throughout the mid-south and west coast, providing product support and advising on broiler health management. Dr. Steinlage obtained her Bachelor's degree in Agriculture and her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree at Kansas State University. She also holds a Master of Avian Medicine (MAM) degree from the University of Georgia and is board certified by the American College of Poultry Veterinarians (Dipl. ACPV).



Dr. Michelle Calvo-Lorenzo

Dr. Michelle Calvo-Lorenzo is a Technical Consultant for the US Cattle and Swine Business Unit at Elanco Animal Health. She joined Elanco in July 2015 as an expert in animal welfare. In

her current role, Michelle leads discussions and develops strategies related to animal welfare, with a focus on the areas of research, communication, guidance, and services to the livestock industry, practicing Veterinarians, public, and Elanco's customers and employees. Michelle graduated with a Master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of California, Davis in 2008 and 2012, respectively. Prior to joining Elanco, she was an Assistant Professor at Oklahoma State University and developed a research and teaching program centered on livestock behavior and welfare. After working within industry and academia over the past several years, Michelle is proud to work alongside hard-working producers, packers, industry representatives, academics, and veterinarians every day. She strives to have a positive impact on livestock welfare and enhance its role in sustainable agriculture.