

Keynote speech

by Steve McIvor, Chief Executive, World Animal Protection,
at the launch of the

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FARM ANIMAL WELFARE: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Steve McIvor

Chief Executive, World Animal Protection

In the time it would take me to say 10 words, more than 7,500 chickens have been slaughtered around the world. Every 10 minutes, about 1 million chickens will have been killed for their meat. One year from now, 50 billion more chickens – seven times the earth's human population – will have been slaughtered. Most of them will have lived their short lives in utterly unacceptable conditions.

More than 70 billion terrestrial animals, including broiler chickens, laying hens, pigs and cattle are farmed every year. They provide people with food and livelihoods. But feeding the world is a constant challenge, with the global population expected to grow by a further two billion people by 2040. This will mean that billions more animals will be raised and slaughtered for consumption each year. Most of these animals will live and will die in unacceptable conditions, unless significant changes take place.

So, where are the biggest problems? The need for the greatest intervention is in the farming of chickens for their meat and eggs, and in pig and dairy farming. The reason is that more and more animals are being reared in intensive systems, and these systems are responsible for significant and widespread negative impacts on animal welfare. Practices such as the selection and manipulation of animals for rapid growth, and the use of confinement mechanisms, such as cages and crates, which severely restrict animal movement and behaviour, are pushing animals to their physical and mental limits.

And where is some of the biggest growth taking place? It's happening in the emerging economies, who have now established themselves as major players in global food animal production. Global demand for meat has meant livestock production in countries like Brazil, China and Thailand is sky-rocketing.

The problem food companies and their investors now need to solve is how to provide for this growing demand without compromising on animal welfare. Livestock production practices that meet animal welfare requirements are necessary to maintain consumer confidence, and with growing interest and investment into non-meat alternatives by major players in the food industry, the challenge for meat and dairy producers is to build better welfare into sustainable, efficient livestock systems.

Fixing animal welfare is a little more complex for a global company than you might think. There are various, cultural, climatic and geographic factors that companies need to take in to account. It's not necessarily a case of, say, simply giving cows more room to roam around. That would be great for countries with year-round moderate climates like in the Cape region of South Africa. But in some countries, getting the cows out of the barns would mean they would freeze or suffer from heat-stroke depending on the time of year. It's local flexibility that is the key to delivering first-rate global animal welfare.

One of the most common questions we get asked is whether technology will lead to drastic improvements in welfare around the globe? The answer is that it may well help, and we are already seeing examples of how technology can enhance animal welfare. Optic Flow Measurement technology, for example, is able to identify lameness in chickens when they are just 4-5 days old. Trained human observers can't pick it up until the animals are at least a couple of weeks old. This technology reduces animal suffering by enabling farmers to intervene earlier.

But technology is, at best, only a partial solution. Ultimately, improvements in animal welfare will only be delivered when companies commit to higher standards and then allocate the human and capital resources required to make these commitments a reality.

This is happening. Companies are realising that their customers are rightly concerned about the sourcing, safety and quality of their food. The most forward thinking global food companies have realised that they need greater transparency in their supply chains; reductions in food waste; clearer food labelling; reduced antibiotic use; and improved farm animal welfare standards, not just to meet their customers' expectations but also to protect their own business integrity.

Encouragingly there is growing interest from food companies and producers in countries such as China. For example, last year, my organisation (World Animal Protection) signed a landmark agreement with Da Bei Nong - one of China's leading agricultural producers. The company has started a trial of higher animal welfare production for pigs, with the aim of scaling-up these efforts this year. The agreement is set to change the lives of millions of pigs, as the company embarks on ambitious expansion plans.

We have also been working with Betagro in Thailand - one of the top 20 global pig producers. Towards the end of last year, the company announced it will phase out both gestation stalls and farrowing crates for sows across its farms by 2027. This will improve the lives of more than 250,000 pigs.

We've also engaged with the Indian government and Indian companies to ensure better welfare practices are being implemented across the dairy sector. We developed the Indian National Dairy Code - the state government of Karnataka recently asked for all the dairies to be registered using this code. Kwality Dairy India, the country's third largest dairy company has become the first to commit to ensuring the better welfare of the animals in its supply chain and have pledged to implement World Animal Protection's 10 dairy welfare commitments.

The wider picture is that farm animal welfare around the world is gradually improving, driven by consumer demand, by corporate commitments and by governmental regulation. However, the scale of growth in industrial farming in markets such as China and the relatively low level of awareness of farm animal welfare among many food companies remain major barriers to progress.

It is here that the work of the [Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare](#) and the efforts of the investors that have signed the [Global Investor Statement of Farm Animal Welfare](#) and that participate in [BBFAW's International Investor Collaboration on Farm Animal Welfare](#) are so important. Investors have a critical role to play in making sure that farm animal welfare is on the agenda for food companies, that companies have effective systems and processes in place to manage the business risks and opportunities presented by farm animal welfare, and, most importantly, encouraging these companies to improve the welfare of all of the animals in their supply chains.

Improving the welfare of all animals farmed for food is a collective responsibility, a responsibility that clearly extends to food companies and to their investors.

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Steve McIvor is Chief Executive, World Animal Protection. World Animal Protection is a global animal welfare organisation with a strong presence in Asia Pacific, Africa, Europe, North America and Latin America. Its programmes protect animals in farming, in the wild, in communities and in disasters. For many years World Animal Protection has been a global catalyst for change, moving people, governments, communities and non-governmental organisations to protect animals across the world. For further information, see <https://www.worldanimalprotection.org/>

BBFAW is the leading global measure of farm animal welfare management, policy commitment, performance and disclosure in food companies. It enables investors, companies, NGOs and other stakeholders to understand corporate practice and performance on farm animal welfare, and it drives – directly and through the efforts of others – corporate improvements in the welfare of animals reared for food. BBFAW is supported by founding partners, Compassion in World Farming and World Animal Protection, who provide technical expertise, guidance, funding and practical resources. In 2014, Collier Capital joined the programme as an additional partner. More information on the programme can be found at www.bbfaw.com