



Keeping livestock healthy and well cared for improves animal, human, environment and economic health

People's lives and livelihoods directly benefit from investments in the health and welfare of their livestock. Good animal health and welfare also safeguard national economies from trade restrictions and bans.

Key Messages

While animal health is a recognized priority for public and private veterinary services worldwide, animal welfare often has to find its place alongside other interventions. However, animal welfare is increasingly recognized as important 'beyond animals' and investing in One Welfare is a complementary One Health approach that highlights the interconnections between animal welfare, human wellbeing and the environment.

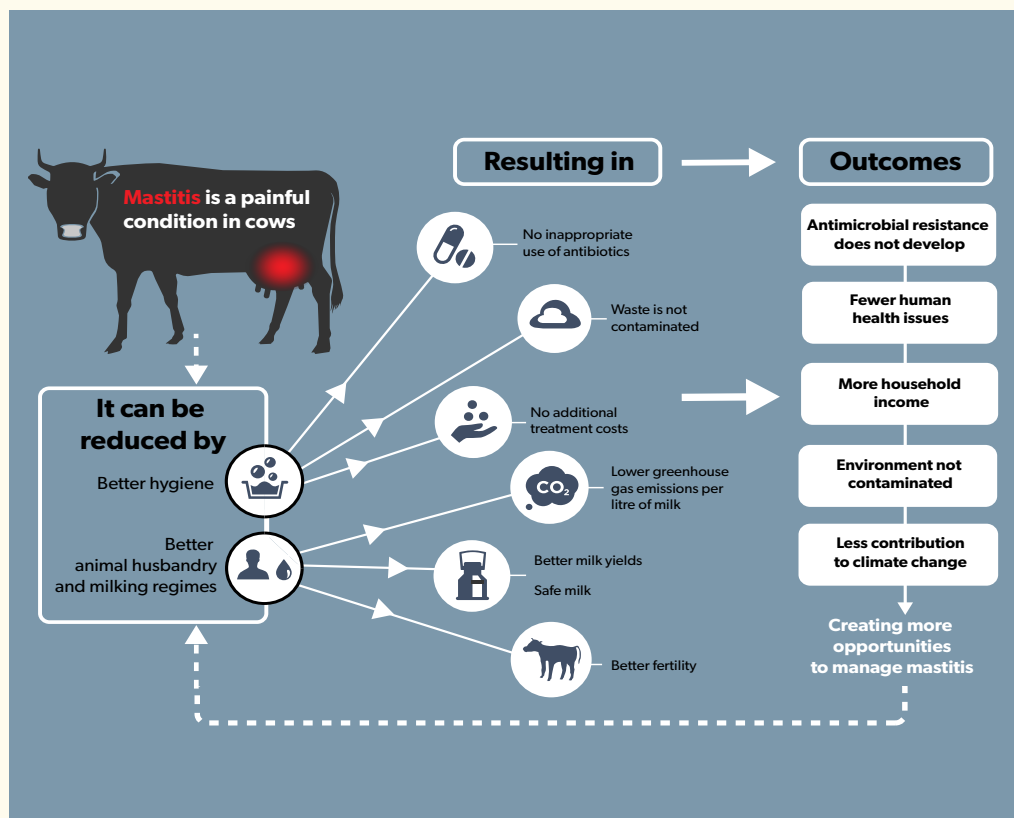
Poor animal health has several knock-on effects. It reduces an animal's value at sale, unsafe livestock products pose risks and costs to consumers, while incidence of disease or poor welfare in a flock or herd threaten livestock export markets.

Poorly managed livestock production is also linked both to poor animal welfare standards and to environmental damage, including land degradation, deforestation, water pollution, loss of wildlife habitats and global warming.

Facts

The examples below highlight how poor animal health and welfare has direct impacts (positive and negative) on livelihoods, the environment and human health.

- The introduction of community animal health workers for Maasai pastoralists in Tanzania was associated with a quadrupling in the average number of cows milked per household.
- The annual impact of foot and mouth disease in terms of visible production losses and vaccination costs amounts to between USD6.5 billion and USD21 billion in regions where the disease is continually circulating (endemic).
- Greenhouse gas emissions of Kenyan smallholder dairy farming systems fell by more than 10% when cow health and husbandry practices were improved. Mastitis infections in the cows were also reduced.
- Subjecting chickens to stress on their journeys to slaughter increases their levels of shedding of *Campylobacter*, a bacteria which can cause diarrhoeal disease in people who go on to eat the under-cooked meat.
- Poor livestock handling and transportation lead to injuries and bruising in animals and subsequent losses of meat post-slaughter. For example, in Uruguay such practices resulted in an average 900g of meat lost per animal slaughtered.
- Welfare friendly products from trusted sources can attract higher prices.



Some believe that animal welfare is a luxury only those in higher income countries can afford. Yet, improving animal welfare has been shown to be linked directly and indirectly to advancing many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular those aiming to achieve zero hunger (SDG2), good health and well-being (SDG 3) and clean water (SDG 6), and to combat climate change (SDG 13) and biodiversity losses (SDG 15). The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) now has animal welfare strategies in place or in development for all inhabited continents.



A pig farmer in Tien Lu district Hung Yen province. Photo credit: ILRI/Trong Chinh.

Improved levels of animal health and care deliver numerous benefits:

More efficient livestock production

Animals that are well fed and watered, kept in clean and comfortable conditions, handled well and given opportunities to express their natural animal behaviours are less likely to die prematurely or to become ill than animals not given such care. Well cared for livestock are also more productive and make more efficient use of resources, so enhancing household food security and incomes. Good care of livestock before slaughter reduces bacterial contamination of the resulting meat. Such contamination harms the quality and value of the meat. It also causes foodborne disease in people, often diarrhoea which is sometimes fatal, with massive economic and health impacts (see brief 4).

Safer animal-source foods

Poorly cared for animals are more likely than well cared for stock to contract diseases or to transmit diseases (zoonoses) to their handlers or to people consuming their meat and milk. This is particularly important in the world's least-developed countries, where diseases transmitted from animals to people make up 25% of the human infectious disease burden.

Maintaining healthy, well cared for animals is also key to reducing the use of antibiotics and other antimicrobial drugs in livestock production systems. Misuse of such drugs encourages the development and spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in disease-causing bacteria, which is a major and growing public health challenge worldwide (see brief 3).

Better livelihoods for farmers

Healthy, well cared for animals attract greater prices at market and their extra resilience to drought, disease and other shocks in particular benefits poorer households and communities. As consumers globally become increasingly concerned with animal welfare, livestock producers who demonstrate well cared for stock may also be able to access new markets.



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Improved environmental outcomes

Livestock systems with healthy, well nourished stock have a lower environmental footprint than those with poorly maintained stock. Ensuring well cared for animals is one of the most effective ways of reducing the greenhouse gas emissions of livestock.

What can be done

1. Direct investment in veterinary services

Greater access by livestock producers to reliable and affordable animal health services is critical. Investments include:

- Provide farmers with quality and affordable health care to their animals.
- Deliver communications campaigns and education programs, accompanied by incentives.
- Support community-based actions. For example, the use of community animal health workers often proves an effective routes to better animal welfare.

2. Support integrated approaches to livestock production

Livestock production systems that safeguard animal welfare benefit the environment as well as the animals. For example, poorly managed herds with inadequate access to feed can be associated with overgrazing and land degradation. Investments include:

- Grow trees on livestock farms. This can allow animals to express important behaviours while also protecting biodiversity.
- Grow fodder trees. This can help to feed animals while also reducing soil erosion.
- Consider commodity-based trade approaches that allow international export market access for livestock. This can mitigate animal health threats and open up market opportunities with less disruption to wildlife and ecosystems.

3. Integrate welfare approaches to increase benefits for farmers

Animal welfare can be an early indicator of economic and health issues in animals. Regular animal welfare assessments and monitoring can ensure problems are anticipated or mitigated and they flag up where action is needed. For example, lameness in cattle is not only a cause of pain and suffering for the animal, but greatly reduces their ability to feed and breed, with resulting losses for the farmer. Projects should link welfare approaches to health, productivity and economic benefits to clearly demonstrate the links. For example, lameness in cattle is not only a cause of pain and suffering for the animal, but greatly reduces their ability to feed and breed, with resulting losses for the farmer.

4. Invest in developing community and policy-led approaches to animal welfare

While animal welfare guidelines and standards are increasingly being established, many countries have yet to implement or enforce animal welfare legislation. Supporting community and policy action on this will lead to positive, practical change for animals and their owners.

References

To view all the references for this brief visit whylivestockmatter.org

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Investing in One Health directly tackles the wicked problems facing our health and the health of the animals and planet around us. One Health integrates and guides the collaborative efforts of multiple disciplines working locally, nationally and globally to attain optimal health for people, animals and our environment. This series of briefs provides evidence-based information on how One Health can support development efforts.

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