

ANIMAL WELFARE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable development has been defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Commission, 1987). The EU’s Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) was set up in 2001 and designed to address serious threats to sustainable development within Europe and globally. Key threats identified included: climate change; public health; transport and land use; management of natural resources.

In June 2006, a comprehensive, renewed Sustainable Development Strategy for the enlarged EU was adopted. It attempts to set out a single, coherent strategy on how the EU will effectively live up to its long-standing commitment to meet the challenges of sustainable development on a European and global basis. The renewed strategy recognises that win-win opportunities need to be exploited in order to reconcile environmental protection and smart economic growth. Animal protection has been recognised as an opportunity for realising some of the objectives of the EU SDS, such as “continuing to promote high animal health and welfare standards in the EU and internationally” and “to avoid overexploitation of natural resources”, in the field of agriculture “through the new legislative frameworks for organic farming and animal welfare”. In several areas of the EU SDS, common actions can be identified which contribute to both improved animal welfare and sustainable development.

A “key objective” of the EU SDS is “to promote good public health on equal conditions and to improve protection against health threats”. In achieving this objective, several areas present potential win-win opportunities between sustainable development and animal welfare.

- **Reducing health risks of intensive livestock production:**

In intensively managed livestock farms, overcrowded conditions facilitate the rapid transmission of infectious diseases, which are also spread through long distance live animal transport. Some of these diseases have a zoonotic potential, representing a risk for human health as well. High economic loss is associated with their control and eradication. Promoting disease prevention has the potential to improve animal welfare and limit the health risks both to animals and humans as well as make large economic savings.

- **Reducing threats from the trade in exotic animals:**

Factors which lead to the emergence of zoonoses in humans include close contacts with wild animals imported through international trade. The EU is a major importer of wild-caught exotic animals for the pet trade, with very few regulations in place for sanitary control. Researchers have warned that the trade in some species should be prohibited on the basis of the risks they represent for human health. Focusing efforts to reduce, or in some case eliminate the trade in wildlife would provide a cost-effective approach to decrease the risks of disease for humans and animals, as well as the animal welfare problems associated with it, reducing at the same time the economic consequences of epidemics.

- **Limiting the use of antibiotics to avoid the development of antimicrobial resistance:**

Many pathogens responsible for serious human disease have developed resistance to antimicrobials partly due to excessive use of antibiotics in current industrial farming.

- **Promoting good animal welfare as part of food quality:**

The link between food quality and animal welfare has been recognised in the 2003 Common Agricultural Policy reform. Some quality assurance schemes have already included animal welfare among their standards, understanding that better animal welfare also brings better food quality, in addition to better economic return.

- **Promoting high animal welfare standards in international trade:**

many developing countries have extensive land and relatively cheap labour, which are needed among other requirements for good animal husbandry. They can use these advantages in trading their agricultural products, with potential for targeting high-value organic and welfare markets in developed countries.

- **Promoting alternative testing methodologies to reduce the threat from chemicals:**

Under the REACH programme 30,000 chemicals will be tested to ensure that they do not pose a threat to the environment or public health, involving the use of millions of animals. The use of alternative non-animal test methods is more ethical, and delivers better scientific results. Most alternatives also present the competitive advantage of being cheaper and quicker to use.

A second “key objective” of the EU SDS is “to improve management and avoid overexploitation of natural resources, recognising the value of ecosystem services”. Win-win opportunities exist in the following areas:

- **Wildlife trade and halting global biodiversity loss:**

The EU is one of the world’s largest importers of wild animals, this trade being fuelled by the growing demand for exotic pets. As a major wildlife consumer, the EU has a particular responsibility to ensure that the trade does not endanger species. Reducing the volume of traded exotic animals would also reduce the inherent animal welfare problems.

- **Agricultural extensification:**

Well-managed extensive farming can offer a win-win opportunity in avoiding problems of poor animal welfare and pollution from excess manure that characterises intensive systems.

- **Marine environment and the sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture:**

reducing catches of non-target species will help preserve marine wildlife and ensure the protection of dolphins and porpoises which are frequently caught accidentally in fishing gears. Whaling continues to threaten the survival of small cetaceans. From an animal welfare point of view no humane way of killing whales exists and the only solution is to ban whaling. In the same way, to be a sustainable alternative to depleted wild fish stocks, aquaculture must be conducted in an environmentally and animal welfare friendly way.

A third “key objective” is “to limit climate change and its costs and negative effects to society and the environment”. Policies that support more extensive forms of agriculture present potential win-win opportunities between sustainable development and animal welfare.

A fourth “key objective” is “to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns”. The market for animal welfare friendly, and thus more sustainable, products is growing along with increasing public awareness. This concretely contributes to the key objective of promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Action needed

To help improve animal welfare and sustainability in the areas highlighted above, the following actions are needed at both EU and national level:

- Introducing market-based instruments designed to internalise costs, such as a tax on excess manure production; and reducing tax on livestock products coming from sustainable production systems.
- The use and increase of CAP rural development funding and a requirement that measures to encourage extensive animal farming and high animal welfare standards are included in all Member States’ rural development plans.
- Promoting changes in consumption and production patterns that support a move away from unsustainable animal exploitation.
- Public procurement policies that support delivery of sustainable and animal welfare friendly consumption.
- Private procurement: the adoption by supermarkets, food manufacturers and chain restaurants of a policy – under their Corporate Social Responsibility Strategies - of sourcing products that have been produced sustainably and under good animal welfare standards.
- Legislative frameworks and enforcement mechanisms that encourage livestock production to develop sustainably, profitably and in an animal welfare friendly way.
- A negotiating position in the WTO negotiations which recognises animal welfare as a consumer preference and a non-trade concern allowing governments to support farmers financially for applying high animal welfare standards.
- Including measures of improved animal welfare among the indicators to the EU and national SDS.
- Promoting sustainable livestock production in developing countries as an alternative to industrial livestock production, through development aid and training.
- Ensuring animal welfare is included in bilateral/multilateral trade and veterinary agreements.
- Reducing the import of exotic animals for the pet trade.