

ANIMAL WELFARE: THE CRUCIAL HUMAN DIMENSION

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RESUME / ABSTRACT

Animal welfare standards have typically emphasized environmental features such as space allowance, ventilation and access to food and water. However, research now makes it clear that very different welfare outcomes are often seen in facilities that use similar environments or that conform to the same animal welfare requirements. This wide variation almost certainly results from human factors that exert a major influence on animal welfare.

What are these human factors? A combination of research and practical experience suggests the following:

- First is having experienced, knowledgeable staff. Knowledgeable staff know what to watch for, and they know what to do when there are signs of trouble.
- Second is the consistency and familiarity of the staff so that animals become accustomed to consistent handling by the same individuals.
- Third is handling skill. Handling that is rough, inexperienced or inconsistent can create a state of fear in the animals that leads to stress responses, reduced efficiency, and even reduced resistance to disease.
- Fourth is staff attitude. People who have a positive attitude toward animals are more likely to pay close attention to them and handle them appropriately.
- Fifth is staff personality. The research (although limited) suggests that some personality types lead to better responses by the animals.
- Sixth is the health and well-being of the staff themselves, because serious breakdowns in animal care are often due to reduced health or mental health of caretakers.
- Seventh, the design of the facility can have important effects by influencing how staff interact with animals.
- Finally, where herd or flock size permits, recognizing animals as individuals can help. If staff know animals individually, they can spot signs of illness early and handle animals according to their individual personalities.

Why has the human dimension of animal welfare received so little attention? I think the answer lies in a mistaken public perception. Over the past half century, the public has tended to view animal production as having shifted from an agricultural to an "industrial" activity, and the public response has been to demand standards and regulations for the animals' environment, much as factories were regulated in the 1800s to protect the health and welfare of workers. Although this approach can help, it focused on the environment rather than the people. A more promising model of change is provided by the health-care professions which focus on ensuring that care-givers are competent, conscientious and adhere to good performance standards. Treating animal production more like a profession and less like an industry could lead to major improvements in animal welfare. Such a change could also help to maintain public confidence in animal producers and give producers the satisfaction of being leaders in the process of change.

L'attention croissante portée récemment sur la nécessité de réduire le recours aux antibiotiques en élevage a tout particulièrement mis en lumière le besoin d'identifier les leviers disponibles pour diminuer le risque de maladies infectieuses et optimiser les usages. L'analyse de la littérature scientifique montre que, outre des facteurs biologiques et techniques (qualité des poussins, de l'alimentation, de l'eau...) et financiers (risque économique), les facteurs psycho-sociaux influencent également le recours aux antibiotiques en élevage.

A l'échelle de l'élevage, des travaux basés sur des approches quantitatives soulignent l'importance des connaissances et attitudes des éleveurs vis-à-vis des antibiotiques et du risque d'antibiorésistance, et abordent également l'influence de facteurs psychologiques tels que les traits de personnalité des éleveurs. Des approches qualitatives ont permis de mettre en lumière l'importance d'autres facteurs, tels que l'identité professionnelle et la représentation du métier d'éleveur. La plupart des travaux conduits à ce jour sur le changement de pratiques mettent l'accent sur le rôle des éleveurs. Si, en matière de réduction de l'usage d'antibiotiques, ces derniers restent les utilisateurs finaux et jouent un rôle important, les travaux de sociologie permettent d'aborder le rôle central des autres acteurs des filières (notamment vétérinaires, organisations de production...) dans les stratégies de maîtrise des usages, et l'importance des mécanismes de coordination entre ces différentes stratégies. Ces travaux montrent également comment les politiques publiques, qui associent mesures incitatives et mesures réglementaires, contribuent à mettre en synergie les différentes démarches entreprises. Ainsi les travaux de sciences sociales permettent de mettre en évidence comment des facteurs non seulement individuels mais aussi organisationnels, institutionnels ou encore marchands, ainsi que différentes échelles (exploitations, cabinets vétérinaires, filières et territoires, politiques publiques et société), interagissent pour favoriser la réduction des usages d'antibiotiques en élevage.