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Animal Rights and Welfare

A GETTING STARTED GUIDE

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

This guide is part of our series of Getting Started Guides that supports your company to develop an embedded strategy. Each guide tackles a specific sustainability sub-issue and explores what your company needs to do to support the resilience of the environmental and social systems around you.

In each guide, we address relevant trends, system thresholds, key concepts, key actors, and key resources. We also offer guidance on how to address the impacts of your operational and value chain activities and develop credible goals as well as outlining key corporate actions and internal targets that can help to provide clarity on the work ahead.

We recommend you read the first guide in the series, Getting Started Guides: An Introduction, which explains our overall approach and clarifies the value of setting a clear strategy anchored in your company's most material issues. It also explains how you can leverage process-based interim targets to clearly outline the specific actions that your company needs to take to achieve its high-level goals.

A complete list of focus areas and sub-issues can be found in our guide Scan: A Comprehensive List of Sustainability Issues for Companies.

This guidebook addresses the sub-issue of **animal rights and welfare** as part of the broader issue topic of nature.

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1 SETTING THE STAGE – THE NEED FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

As defined by the World Organisation of Animal Health (WOAH), "animal welfare is a complex and multi-faceted subject with scientific, ethical, economic, cultural, social, religious and political dimensions." For many, views on animal welfare are driven by their perspectives on ethical responsibility or animal rights, including discussions about whether animals hold inherent value or moral status that shape how we perceive, interact with, and take action on animal welfare across institutions. Animals are often recognised to "have the capacity to experience positive and negative feelings such as pleasure, joy, pain and distress," and the conversation around our understanding of animal consciousness is rapidly evolving as we acquire new information, further informing the ethical dimension of animal welfare. One argument for why we should care about animal welfare based on ethics suggests that "humans have a moral obligation to care for animals because many domesticated animals and animals in captivity depend on humans for their survival."

Animal welfare should be considered as a component of environmental and social sustainability. It has implications for human health, the environment, and socio-economic development – a connection acknowledged internationally by a resolution adopted by the UN Environment Programme in 2022. For example, animal welfare practices tied to improving animal health under human care – including measures such as proper vaccinations for diseases and reducing overcrowding to avoid injuries, stress, and other factors – reduce the need for extended or overuse of treatments, mitigating human public health risks for shared diseases and antimicrobial resistance.

Whether within the food system, for animal-derived materials, or as subjects for testing, animals are present in the value chains of many industries and attention to their welfare is increasingly gaining momentum.

Often, the lives of animals are entirely reliant on their experiences within company supply chains, and in too many cases, there is little oversight and consideration into how these animals are treated or the quality of life they experience. Wild animals can also be adversely impacted by company actions and demands – from poaching for exotic furs to the death of animals due to human-animal conflicts on farms or other industrial operations, their welfare can intersect with company operations in a range of ways. Broadly, companies need to ensure that animals directly within their value chains and those that interact with various value chain activities are able to live in an environment without harm, are healthy, well-nourished, free from unnecessary pain, fear, or distress, and are able to express normal behaviour.

For instance, one of the sectors that often faces considerable scrutiny is industrial farming, where welfare considerations are often grouped into three categories: on farm, in transport, and at slaughter. Industrialised methods of raising animals for food such as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO's), also often referred to as "factory farms," are increasingly targeted. Critics claim that these systems prioritise the use of minimal resources to meet the ever-increasing demand for animal products and by-products, often placing the welfare of animals in jeopardy.

Ineffective and inhumane slaughter processes can prolong pain for animals and increase their suffering at their end of life, and, as the FAO states, "it is imperative for ethical reasons that the methods used do not inflict pain." The Farm Animal Welfare Council found that non-stun slaughter or practices that are inefficient at effectively stunning animals at slaughter (such as live-shackle slaughter for chickens) result in animals suffering "very significant pain and distress in the period before insensibility supervenes." The transition to ethical and safe slaughter processes requires minimising the pain, distress, and suffering of animals through a range of practices such as humane handling and properly applied stunning mechanisms that render animals unconscious prior to slaughter.

From spending their entire lifetimes in confined and overcrowded conditions to physical mutilations, many of the practices of industrial farms are considered inhumane by international and industry organisations such as The Jane Goodall Institute and Compassion in World Farming. In recent years, both organisations have partnered with the United Nations Environment Programme, showcasing the rise in attention to the issue of animal welfare on the global stage.

Beyond industrial farming, other animal-sourced material streams come with their own issues for ensuring animal welfare. These often overlap with concerns raised with factory farms, as many animals are raised within the same system. Materials such as down feathers are criticised for painful practices such as live plucking, where feathers are plucked while ducks and geese are fully conscious, as is foie gras, which is a food product made from the liver of ducks and geese that requires force-feeding them fatty foods. Both of these products can cause significant harm to their wellbeing.

Animal testing, while often considered essential for biomedical research, is also increasingly under scrutiny. Many animals are bred for use in laboratory testing and many procedures have the potential to cause significant distress and suffering for the animals involved. Increasingly, jurisdictions are shifting away from animal research to reduce harm, and where possible, employ the use of alternative methods. For example, the European Union has a legal requirement for any animal testing to use the "3Rs" principle: "replacing the use of animals with non-animal methods where possible; reducing the number of animals used to a minimum while still obtaining scientifically valid results; refining practices to minimise the stress and improve the welfare of study animals used for regulatory purposes."

With rising attention to animal welfare, companies also face a range of reputational and operational risks. For example, consumers are increasingly aware of and concerned about violations of animal rights in the products they use and consume – the European Citizens' Initiative End the Cage Age, calling for the elimination of cages in animal farming, was signed by over 1.3 million citizens and over 170 organisations in the European Union. Shifting public opinion, links to human health, and increasing regulatory pressures have elevated attention to animal welfare, creating material financial and investment risks.

In 2023, animal welfare was included within the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct, stating that companies should respect animal welfare standards that are aligned with the World Organisation for Animal Health Terrestrial Code. Good animal welfare is defined by the OECD as including "disease preventions and appropriate veterinary care, shelter, management and nutrition, a stimulating and safe environment, humane handling and humane slaughter or killing." Companies have a crucial role to play in ensuring all animals within their value chain are treated ethically and that animal welfare is a priority.

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Note: In these guides, a system threshold is defined as the point at which the resilience of an environmental, social, or economic system becomes compromised. This occurs when the total impacts imposed on the system exceed its capacity to assimilate those impacts.

SYSTEM THRESHOLD

Animal welfare is not simply about animals living a "happy life." Neglecting animal welfare erodes protections for human health, food security, and livelihoods by decreasing the health of the animals we consume or use, resulting in a cascade of impacts on integral societal systems. To meet our moral obligations to animals and protect the societal systems that rely on their wellbeing, companies need to employ sustainable models of care that respect animal welfare and ensure that animals within their operations and their value chain are healthy, well-nourished, free from unnecessary pain, fear, or distress, and are able to express normal behaviour.

KEY TOPICS WITHIN ANIMAL RIGHTS AND WELFARE:

- Rights and welfare of animals under human control
- Ethical approach to protecting all animals, including freedom from hunger and thirst, appropriate nutrition, freedom from pain, injury, and disease, freedom from fear and distress, freedom from discomfort, and freedom to express behaviours that promote wellbeing

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2 KEY CONCEPTS IN ANIMAL RIGHTS AND WELFARE

Animal welfare, as defined by the World Organisation for Animal Health, is "the physical and psychological wellbeing of an animal. The welfare of an animal can be described as good or high if the individual is fit, healthy, free to express natural behaviour, free from suffering and in a positive state of wellbeing."

The Five Freedoms Model, initially developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, outlines freedoms that an animal must have to be protected from unnecessary suffering under human care. These freedoms include:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from discomfort
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour
5. Freedom from fear and distress

The Five Domains Model builds upon the Five Freedoms Model, outlining more comprehensive internal and external circumstances that impact animal welfare to allow for systematic and structured assessments of animal welfare. The five domains include:

1. Nutrition, including water and food deprivation and malnutrition
2. Physical environment, including air quality, temperature, space, light, noise, and other physical and atmospheric challenges
3. Health, including injury, disease, and functional impairment
4. Behavioural interactions, including behavioural and/or movement restrictions
5. Mental state, including negative states such as fear, frustration, hunger, pain, or boredom
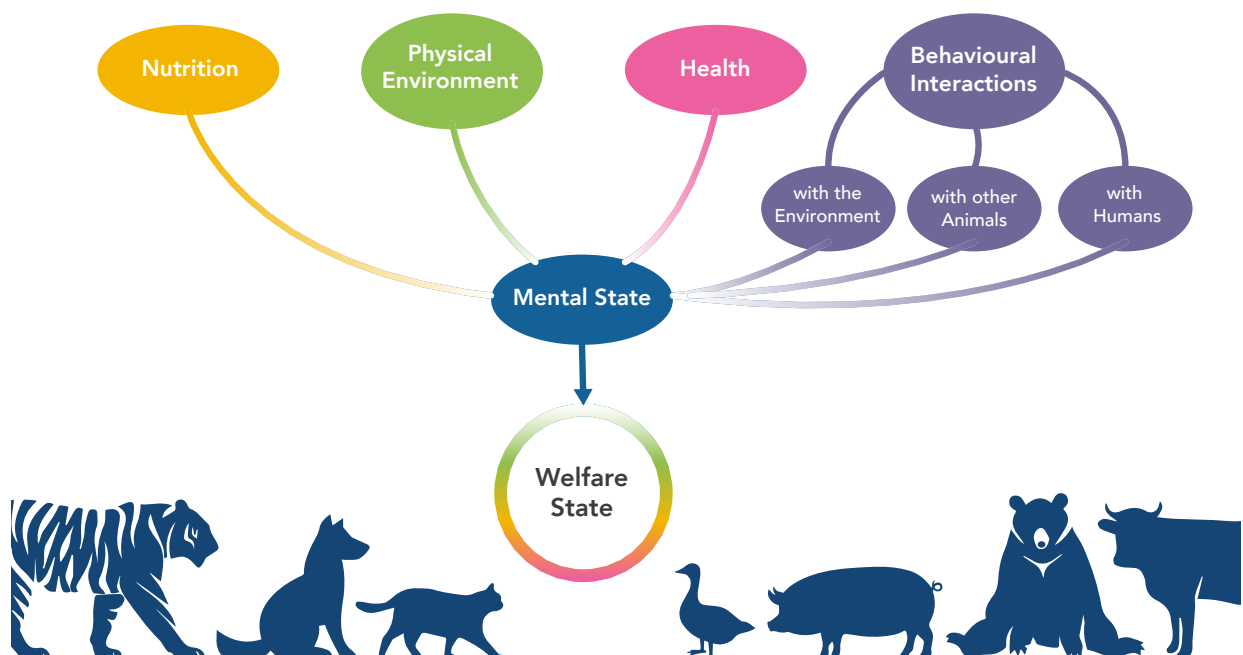
Adapted from: FOUR PAWS

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3 KEY PLAYERS IN ANIMAL RIGHTS AND WELFARE

WORLD ORGANISATION FOR ANIMAL HEALTH

The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) is an intergovernmental organisation working to improve animal health across the world. Their Animal Health Terrestrial Code is the most universally recognised approach to animal welfare and is recognised by the OECD.

THE GLOBAL COALITION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

The Global Coalition for Animal Welfare (GCAW) brings together companies across the food industry to help identify and address barriers to the transition to higher animal welfare practices. Current members include major companies such as Unilever and Ikea.

WORLD ANIMAL PROTECTION

World Animal Protection is one of the largest international non-profits and has been working to support animal welfare for over 70 years. It promotes the importance of animal welfare and encourages commitments to animal-friendly practices across 12 countries.

COMPASSION IN WORLD FARMING

Compassion in World Farming is a farm animal welfare organisation dedicated to achieving humane and sustainable food systems that operates across Europe, US, China, and South Africa. They have collaborated with various global actors such as UNEP and the Chatham House, such as for the launch of the Food System Impacts on Biodiversity Loss report.

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4 COMMITTING TO TAKE ACTION – MID- AND LONG-TERM GOALS

Committing to take action on animal rights and welfare can include addressing many of the key topics listed above. The mid- and long-term commitments that your organisation elects to make will be based on your identified priorities, areas of greatest impact, and your capacity to undertake the work required. It is important to note that this section does not provide all possible mid- and long-term goals related to this issue. Below, we share our understanding of current corporate action and goals by offering a sample of the goals that were most frequently adopted by organisations in our research.

Common mid- and long-term goals and/or commitments on **animal rights and welfare** include variations of the following:

Long-term goal: Move to higher welfare systems to improve animal welfare in supply chains.

- Source 100% cage free eggs by 20[XX].
- Improve broiler chicken welfare throughout the value chain by 20[XX], including the improvement of living environments, reducing maximum stocking density, utilising effective stunning systems, and more as identified.
- End the use of closed confinement throughout the value chain by 20[XX].
- End the use of routine on-farm mutilation practices by 20[XX].
- Eliminate the use of gestation crates for sows by 20[XX].
- End long-distance live transport throughout the value chain by 20[XX].
- Ensure properly applied, effective, and humane stunning practices before slaughter.

Long-term goal: Ensure animal by-products used in products are procured ethically.

- 100% fur-free products by 20[XX].
- Eliminate the use of exotic animal skin in products by 20[XX].
- Design all new products without animal fur and exotic animal skin.
- Use [or support the use of] wildlife-friendly farming practices – for example, sourcing 100% badger-friendly honey.

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Long-term goal: Eliminate animal testing for products.

- Use alternative methods for testing, where possible.
- Reduce the number of animals used to a minimum while still obtaining scientifically valid results.
- Refine practices to minimise the stress and improve the welfare of study animals used for regulatory purposes.

For more commitments specific to a certain species or animal product, it may be helpful to look towards key industry commitments, such as the Better Chicken Commitment which provides standards for higher broiler welfare practices in the food industry.

Are you setting new goals or interested in benchmarking your goals against leading practice?
To help advance progress in credible corporate sustainability goals, we maintain a public goals database containing leading sustainability goals and commitments set by large companies globally.

Explore our Sustainability Goals Database for more mid- and long-term goals on animal rights and welfare.

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5 HOW TO GET THERE – PROCESS-BASED INTERIM TARGETS

Note: *The following proposed timelines are only for guidance and are based on the pace outlined by other companies. The timeframe for actions and work for each step needs to be embedded in your organisational context, which may require different time allocations.*

YEAR 1: UNDERSTAND ANIMAL WELFARE ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Begin by learning about animal welfare issues and concerns linked to your offerings and how these issues can manifest in your value chains. Identify international and/or national laws that outline minimum standards around animal rights and welfare where you operate, as well as other instruments such as principles, research, and guidance that set expectations on animal welfare.

YEAR 1: BENCHMARK BEST PRACTICES AND STANDARDS

Identify best practice within your industry and benchmark how your company compares. Explore specific international standards for species that are present within your value chain and the requirements for the WOAH Terrestrial Animal Health Code. Determine opportunities to strengthen your stance and practices that can help secure animal welfare and whether there are opportunities to make positive changes such as using fewer animal-derived materials, alternative testing methods, or diversifying portfolios that can contribute to good animal welfare.

CASE STUDY: Patagonia aligns with animal welfare standards

To develop its animal welfare policy, Patagonia partnered with animal welfare experts to benchmark best practices from large international brands for responsibly sourcing animal fibers. Using this as a crucial grounding component, the company identified species-specific certifications standards that align with a range of key materials, as well as a list of Non-Species-Specific Animal Welfare Requirements for all suppliers to meet that are based on learnings from the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

YEAR 1: MAP YOUR VALUE CHAIN

Supporting animal welfare in your value chain starts with getting a better understanding of its potential impacts and key leverage points for change. Begin by mapping your upstream network of suppliers (tier 1) and their suppliers (tier 2) for animal-derived products and materials. Your upstream supply chain map should help you identify the goods and services with the largest impact on and risks for animal welfare. Gathering and understanding the impact of supply chain partners can help you prioritise and focus interventions on their most material issues and ensure that tangible improvements are made.

Examples of process-based targets for Year 1:

- By 20[XX], we will understand key animal rights and welfare issues.
- By 20[XX], we will identify animal welfare and other associated legislation that impacts our operations and value chains.
- By 20[XX], we will benchmark our current animal welfare practices against industry standards for best practice.
- By 20[XX], we will map out our value chain to understand where our key risks for animal welfare reside.

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YEAR 2: EDUCATE AND TRAIN EMPLOYEES ON ANIMAL WELFARE

Develop a plan to educate and train employees in relevant groups on animal welfare issues and concerns that may emerge during product development and within your value chain. Use this training to embed respect for animal welfare into product design and procurement decision-making within your organisation.

CASE STUDY: Danone's animal welfare training sessions

In partnership with animal welfare organisations, Danone has provided a series of training sessions on animal welfare across their operational regions to raise the awareness of employees and farmers. In 2022, they engaged 350 farmers across 8 countries in animal welfare awareness training.

YEAR 2: ENGAGE WITH YOUR PROCUREMENT TEAM TO UNDERSTAND THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR ANIMAL-DERIVED MATERIALS AND PRODUCTS

The planning phase of the procurement cycle is a crucial time to ensure that you can source animal-derived materials and products ethically. After you have mapped your value chain, it is time to engage your procurement team in the process to better understand sourcing opportunities and constraints.

Examples of process-based targets for Year 2:

- By 20[XX], we will educate and train our employees in animal welfare.
- By 20[XX], we will engage with our procurement team to understand the opportunities and constraints for animal-derived materials and products.

YEAR 3: DEVELOP POLICIES TO SUPPORT ANIMAL WELFARE IN YOUR VALUE CHAIN

For many companies, their greatest impacts on animal welfare reside in their value chain. Create animal welfare policies and codes of practice that align with the WOAH Terrestrial Animal Health Code referenced in the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct, and communicate your expectations clearly.

Periodically visit and inspect supplier and other relevant facilities to ensure that they continue to meet your outlined welfare standards and policies. Engage with and learn from existing animal welfare assessment guidelines and protocols – the Welfare Assessment Training and Resources page from the U.S. Department of Agriculture can be a good place to start. Adapt these learnings to your context to ensure that they meet the unique needs of your organisation.

CASE STUDY: Unilever's Live Transport and Slaughter Implementation Guide

To support the transition to higher animal welfare practices for livestock transportation and slaughter across their supply chain, Unilever developed an implementation guide, aligned with their Sustainable Agriculture Code, that provides guidance on good practice and measures to improve current systems. It provides in-depth information on key aspects of live transport and slaughter, differentiating best practice standards for beef & pork and poultry.

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YEAR 3: ARTICULATE A POSITION

Articulate a position on animal-derived materials and products that pose the greatest concern for your company – this can lend accountability and communicate your organisation's role in upholding animal welfare and in ethical and responsible sourcing. This can also include how you are engaging with organisations and collaborations that are working to improve the ethical sourcing of key animal-derived materials. A public position statement can also be an important pathway to aligning your organisation on purpose and intent.

CASE STUDY: Woolworths position on key farm animal welfare issues

Woolworths Holdings clearly defines their vision for higher animal welfare throughout their supply chain in their Animal Welfare Policy. It specifies the practices that are prohibited under specific issues, such as confinement and mutilations, and best practices that they will be promoting throughout their engagements with suppliers. The position statement aligns with the Five Freedoms on Animals as a grounding perspective.

To help companies develop strong, clear positions, we maintain a public database containing leading position statements articulated by large companies globally – explore our Position Database for more commitments on animal rights and welfare.

YEAR 3: EXPLORE CERTIFICATION SCHEMES

Explore whether third party assurance schemes can supplement your efforts. Take care, however, not to rely on certifications and standards as your only source of verification. Sustainability and animal welfare certification programs can lack credibility and be susceptible to weak standards, noncompliance, and greenwashing, even if they are the leading sources for action on key issues. Over the last decade, almost every certification scheme has faced scrutiny or flaws in their work – including the Responsible Down Standard and the Global Animal Partnership Standard.

Despite the challenges with certifications, it is important to engage with these key actors for guidance, collaboration, and action. Companies should complement this engagement by thoroughly exploring and learning the risks of animal-sourced materials and conducting their own verifications within supply chains to ensure that they are not relying solely on certifications for claims.

Examples of process-based targets for Year 3:

- By 20[XX], we will develop a policy and/or codes of practice to ensure animal welfare in our value chain.
- By 20[XX], we will build a welfare training and assessment process to ensure effective oversight in our value chain.
- By 20[XX], we will articulate a position on animal rights and welfare.
- By 20[XX], we will understand the role of certification schemes in ensuring animal welfare and identify how they may apply to our strategy.

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RESOURCES

GUIDANCE

UNDERSTANDING ANIMAL WELFARE

The Five Freedoms Model outlines the five freedoms that safeguard the welfare of animals under human care.

The Five Domains Model builds upon the Five Freedoms Model, outlining more comprehensive internal and external circumstances that impact animal welfare to allow for systematic and structured assessments of animal welfare. It identifies key domains that influence an animals' ability to survive and thrive under human care that should be positively impacted for animal welfare.

ACTION ON ANIMAL WELFARE

The Terrestrial Animal Health Code by WOAH provides international standards for improving animal health and welfare. It is the most universally referenced standard, appearing in the internationally recognised documents such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct.

The GCAW Approach to Animal Welfare by GCAW aims to support the development of an industry roadmap for improving farm animal welfare and presents a set of six broad aims for animal care that have the potential to contribute to good animal welfare outcomes.

Implementing Animal Welfare Commitments: GCAW Member Experiences by GCAW provides insights on how member companies have implemented their animal welfare commitments and outlines a best practice framework which can be adapted to company contexts to improve animal welfare in supply chains.

Animal Welfare in Fashion 2023: Towards a truly ethical and transparent fashion industry by FOUR PAWS International examines the fashion industry to understand progress and performance on improving animal welfare. It analyses 100 brands using Good On You's methodology for 'animals' and can be helpful to understand what best practice on animal welfare looks like in the fashion industry.

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TOOLS

Animal Welfare Standards Benchmark by the Textile Exchange outlines minimum requirements for cattle production that existing standards and certification schemes must guarantee. It covers a basic level of care to accommodate different systems of cattle farming around the world.

The Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare analyses farm animal welfare policies, management systems, reporting, and performance of the largest food companies.

The Animal Protection Index by World Animal Protection ranks 50 countries according to existing animal welfare policies and legislation. The platform offers a full profile on the countries and assesses them according to ten indicators that are grouped into four goals to understand how they address animal welfare issues. The goals include: recognition of animal sentience and prohibition of animal suffering, presence of animal welfare legislation, establishment of supportive government bodies, and support for international animal welfare standards. It can be a good resource to explore current legislation around the world.

Explore more resources on animal rights and welfare here.

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