



World Veterinary Association Position on the Role of Veterinarians in Food Safety

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BACKGROUND

Preventing contamination in the food supply chain, from farm to fork, reduces the risk of foodborne diseases. The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has laid down instructions on veterinary legislation applicable to the human food chain¹, which requires an official veterinarian to carry out ante- and post-mortem (AM/PM) inspection of all animals destined for human consumption. *Control or reduction of biological hazards of public health and animal health importance by AM/PM meat inspection is a core responsibility of Veterinary Services* (Article 6.2.4.). Legislation in most jurisdictions around the world reflects these standards. AM/PM inspections and risk management improve the economic performance of livestock enterprises; directly or indirectly benefiting animal and human health and welfare.

The veterinary profession plays a central role in controls of food of animal origin and live animals carried out at the border. The veterinary certification of health and hygiene status for export purposes represent a big responsibility.

Another serious hazard for food safety is the presence of harmful amounts of residues of veterinary medicinal products, pesticides, and environmental contaminants in the food of animal origin. The use of antimicrobials in animals can be one of the contributors to increased antimicrobial resistance (AMR). The responsible use of antimicrobials by veterinarians is essential to AMR risk management.

Other important veterinary tasks along the food chain are approval, audits and inspections of slaughterhouses and other processing facilities producing food of animal origin, certification, and inspection of other food animal products such as eggs and dairy.

WVA POSITION

The contribution of the veterinary profession to the safety of food of animal origin is well recognised and valued by the WVA. The veterinarian's role in ante- and post-mortem inspection is critical for food safety and must be maintained as a component of each country's official inspection process. The veterinary profession is not only the protector of the general health and welfare of animals but also that of the public in relation to zoonotic disease transmission. The WVA concludes that good animal health and welfare is an essential precondition for producing safe food of animal origin.

The WVA supports research and innovations in food safety, such as improved farm productivity, vaccination programs and optimisation of the use of antimicrobials.

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¹Chapter 1.4., Article 1.4.4. point 4; Chapter 3.4, Article 3.4.12. and Chapter 6.2.4. of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code;

All stakeholders are encouraged to apply the highest safety standards in food production and internationally accepted guidelines, such as those laid out by the Codex Alimentarius Commission and OIE for animal health and welfare and the safety of animal-derived foods.

The WVA recommends that governments implement appropriate legislation and provide sufficient resources to ensure that veterinarians have a leading role in food safety inspection. The veterinary profession should direct and support food safety advocacy efforts calling for the application of established food safety practices, sound principles of environmental sanitation and rigorous personal hygiene standards for all operators of slaughterhouses and processing plants.

The WVA also encourages veterinarians to participate and promote One Health collaborations at all levels of professional practice relevant to food safety: for example, to mitigate antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and zoonoses in food animals, including wildlife traded through informal or illegal markets.

The WVA supports the emphasis on food safety and One Health in the curricula of veterinary colleges and supports increased awareness of the public, food producers and distributors, regarding the production of safe food of animal origin.

References:

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