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WVA Position Statement on Pain Management in Farmed Animals

WVA POSITION

- The WVA acknowledges that animals are sentient and perceive pain.
- The WVA recognizes that there is a need for improved pain recognition and mitigation strategies in farmed animals undergoing husbandry-related as well as medical and surgical procedures. When alternatives are not available, husbandry-related procedures should be conducted by trained and competent individuals, using the least invasive technique suitable together with evidence-based pain mitigation strategies.
- Veterinary professionals should be well educated on evidence-based farmed animal pain recognition and management, including the use of pain scoring systems, pain mitigation strategies, and implications of invasive husbandry-related practices on animal welfare.
- The WVA encourages the study and development of novel pain assessment and mitigation techniques and therapeutics for use in farmed animals.

The WVA calls on its members to advocate for better protections for farmed animal welfare in their country or region. Such improvements can be made by addressing gaps in the training of veterinarians, producers, and other animal health care team members on evidence-based pain recognition and mitigation strategies in farmed animals; gaps in appropriate legislation, regulation, and guidelines governing farmed animal health and welfare, particularly during husbandry-related and other routine and invasive surgical procedures; and gaps in availability of high-quality medicines approved to treat pain in farmed animals.

Background

Pain, defined as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with, actual or potential tissue damage¹, directly affects the welfare and quality of life of an animal. Failure to adequately manage pain is a significant cause of suffering in animals, and farmed animals are no exception. Suffering is a term frequently used in conjunction with pain, implying an acutely or chronically unpleasant or aversive, physical or emotional state of an animal.

Appropriate pain recognition and management is critical for improving the welfare of farmed animals. Relieving farmed animal pain is a shared responsibility of veterinary professionals and producers and should be a key consideration in treating various medical and surgical conditions and performing husbandry-related procedures on farmed animals. In some cases, painful procedures are performed on animals to make them better suited for the environment in which they will be raised without the use of anaesthesia and/or analgesia, e.g., tail docking in piglets, disbudding in calves. Husbandry changes or other alternatives may be available to reduce the need to routinely perform these types of painful procedures. Most veterinary associations recognize the professional duty of veterinarians to relieve pain and suffering in animals, and several organizations recognize acute and chronic pain and suffering as clinically important conditions in farmed animals; they advocate for the prevention and alleviation of pain and suffering².

1. Raja SN, Carr DB, Cohen M, et al. The revised International Association for the Study of Pain definition of pain: concepts, challenges, and compromises. *Pain*. 2020, 1; 161:1976-82. doi: 10.1097/j.pain.0000000000001939.

2. Steagall PV, Bustamante H, Johnson CB, Turner PV. Pain Management in Farm Animals: Focus on Cattle, Sheep and Pigs. *Animals (Basel)*. 2021, 11:1483. doi: 10.3390/ani11061483.