6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Animal welfare in the food system and Sustainable Development Goal 6

ANALYSIS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT



This document has been prepared by the **World Federation for Animals** as a contribution to the 2026 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the UN Water Conference. It has analysed **the essential role of animal welfare in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6)**. In line with the One Health approach and international policy guidelines, the Federation **has identified recommendations for policy frameworks** to recognise and promote the role of animals in securing clean water and sanitation.

All statistics, data, and recommendations presented in this document are supported by peer-reviewed research and official reports from international organisations. **Full citations and source materials are available in our complete position paper.** Scan the QR code on the last page to access it.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABOUT US

The **World Federation for Animals (WFA)** is a global federation of over 70 NGOs working to embed animal welfare into sustainable development worldwide. We advocate for integrating animal welfare into international health, food, and environmental regimes, and trade and development finance rules.

Since our establishment in 2020, **WFA has become a UN-accredited force** driving transformative change for animals by uniting peers and experts to influence global decision-making at the UN and other international institutions.

We achieve global impact for animals – together.

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ANIMAL FARMING AND AGRICULTURAL PRESSURE ON WATER

Agriculture remains by far the largest user of water.

71%

of global freshwater withdrawals are used by agriculture*

90%

of global water consumption is used by agriculture, largely derived from the indirect water used to produce animal feed*

The current animal production system is a significant source of pollution.

Excess nutrients from intensive livestock farming, particularly **from fertiliser and animal waste**, threaten water quality and ecosystems by driving harmful algal blooms that create “dead zones” and kill aquatic flora and fauna. These blooms can **also contaminate drinking water**, producing toxins contributing to health risks including digestive and hormonal disorders and miscarriage.

Addressing the overconsumption of animal-source foods to reduce pressure on water systems

The consumption of animal-source foods (ASF) in certain regions raises concerns about **human health and sustainability.** A dietary shift in ASF-overconsuming regions and population groups toward closer adherence to healthy diet principles would result in benefits for human health and the environment.

It would **reduce terrestrial and aquatic animal farming’s pressure on water resources**, as animals have lower water productivity compared with crops while facilitating the transition towards more sustainably integrated agricultural systems.

3x

higher consumption of animal products in high-income and high-middle-income countries than the Healthy Diets Basket*

Improving animal welfare can contribute to more sustainable farming and water use.

Healthier animals often exhibit better feed conversion, lower mortality, and more consistent growth, which reduces the amount of feed and other inputs required per unit of output. **Gains in feed efficiency can translate into reductions in overall water demand.**

Furthermore, systems that provide animals with **more space, opportunities for natural behaviour, or environmental enrichment** may support welfare while also reducing reliance on intensive feedlot inputs and minimising water withdrawals or pollution.

ANIMAL HEALTH, WATER SAFETY AND ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE (AMR)

Water and animal health are bidirectionally related.

4.95 m

deaths linked to antimicrobial resistance in 2019 only, partly driven by antibiotic use in animal agriculture entering water systems*

70%

of global antibiotics is consumed by livestock*

Unsafe water can cause **animal mortality and morbidity.**

Conversely, water can be polluted by, and serve as a carrier of, animal pathogens and veterinary drugs, including antimicrobials, **leading to increased antimicrobial resistance.**

The latter can be worsened by antimicrobials used for non-veterinary purposes, including to mitigate the effects of poor welfare and poor husbandry practices.



Protecting water and animal health through improved animal welfare.

Increased animal health is critically linked to higher animal welfare conditions which would be supported, among others, by the transition towards the recommended integrated agricultural systems and would further result in **reduction of water pollution from veterinary drugs and water-related antimicrobial resistance.**

Reducing overcrowding and stress, which characterise intensive farming, has the potential to reduce the disease burden on animals, prevent injuries, and strengthen animals' immune systems, thereby decreasing the need for veterinary drugs, including antibiotics.

REAL WORLD **EXAMPLES**

Pastoralism and Integrated Water Resources Management in Peru

In the Nor Yauyos Cochas Landscape Reserve, overgrazed grasslands and water scarcity threatened livelihoods for communities where **approximately 70% of households depended on ruminant livestock.** The *UNDP–UNEP–IUCN Global Mountain Ecosystem-based Adaptation Programme* operationalised community-level Integrated Water Resources Management to safeguard and restore water resources, combining sustainable pasture and livestock management with ecosystem restoration and community-managed water allocation agreements. This ensured equitable access to continuous safe water supply for communities, livestock, and wildlife.





Sustainable livestock production in Costa Rica

Costa Rica has promoted livestock production models that integrate productivity, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare. Through the *Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action for Livestock* (Livestock NAMA), the country promotes silvopastoral systems, improved animal management practices, soil conservation, and efficient water use. These systems improve animal health and welfare, reduce pressure on water resources, and strengthen the resilience of rural communities.

WORKING ANIMALS SUPPORTING WATER ACCESS

How working animals contribute directly to SDG 6.

Working animals contribute to SDG 6 through their **well-evidenced role in water transport** for drinking for both people and other farmed animals, cooking, irrigation, and washing, reducing time burdens - especially for women and girls - associated with water collection. This role is particularly important during climate shocks and disasters, when water access is constrained. Working equids, like horses and donkeys, also support waste management in cities, rural and peri-urban settings and contribute to broader **WASH system functions,** meaning the institutional, infrastructural, and operational components that deliver Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene services, by enabling sufficient water transport for hygiene practices, helping reduce exposure to unsafe water sources.



Horses and donkeys enabling water access in Senegal

In climate-vulnerable pastoral regions of Senegal, rising temperatures, prolonged drought, and land degradation have intensified water scarcity and disrupted traditional grazing systems. In these contexts, working animals are essential for transporting drinking water to households and maintaining access to markets and service. As water points become more distant and seasonal variability increases, **household water security is increasingly dependent on the mobility and working capacity of equids.**

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADVANCE WORK ON SDG 6

AREA	RECOMMENDATION
ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE & ONE HEALTH APPROACH	In line with the **One Health approach**, achieving SDG 6 requires **improved animal health and welfare**; veterinary services, improved husbandry and welfare standards by respecting species specific behaviour and needs for both food-producing and working animals, **recognising their role in water access, climate resilience, and disaster preparedness.**
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS	The more sustainable management of water resources, the reduction of nutrient and chemical pollution, and the protection of ecosystems, all necessitate **the transition towards agricultural systems that better integrate crops, forests, livestock and fisheries** - e.g. agroecology, agroforestry and integrated crop-livestock systems -, as generally stressed in relevant international policy documents, including the FAO's *Conceptual Framework for Integrated Land and Water Resources Management*.
ANIMAL SOURCE FOODS (ASF) CONSUMPTION	The transition towards more sustainable agricultural systems, with more efficient use of freshwater resources, could be facilitated by **a closer adherence to the WHO healthy diet principles** in regions and population groups where there is a remarkably high rate of animal source foods (ASF) overconsumption.

Scan to access the full position paper on animal welfare in the food system & Sustainable Development Goal 6.

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