

A Century of Improving Animal Health and Welfare

ANNIVERSARY REFLECTIONS



World Organisation
for Animal Health
Founded in 1924



Ever since humans inhabited the earth, animals have been an integral part of our lives and sustainability. Whether they assist in work, provide a source of food and livelihoods, or simply as our companions, their existence, health and well-being are intertwined with our own.

Because we share a special bond with animals, it is our responsibility to care for their health and welfare.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) was created 100 years ago for this very purpose. From setting standards to amplifying the voice of the veterinary workforce in the global health agenda, let us reflect on our journey: a century of improving animal health and welfare.

Controlling the spread of animal diseases



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Europe – 1960. A farmer disinfects pig feeders to prevent the spread of African swine fever. This highly contagious and fatal disease continues to be a major global crisis in the pork industry.

"Through collaboration with WOAHA, countries navigate trade complexities with confidence, fostering resilience and safeguarding public health in the global trading system."

Jean-Marie Paugam,
WTO Deputy
Director-General

1920. Trade zebu from India passed through Belgium on their way to Brazil, and sparked an unexpected outbreak of rinderpest, the deadliest cattle disease in history. To discuss the dynamics and far-reaching impacts of this outbreak, France hosted an international conference in 1921 which led to the creation of the Office international des epizooties (OIE, currently WOAHA) three years later.

2011. Rinderpest was declared eradicated from the world. The disease had existed at least since the 4th century, with a mortality rate reaching 100% in vulnerable herds. The devastating consequences

of this disease on animal lives and human livelihoods over the centuries are unnumberable. **Following global, coordinated efforts, rinderpest is today the only disease to have been eradicated, alongside smallpox in humans.**

Sharing animal health information

Together with other stakeholders, WOAHA is working to replicate this success for other important transboundary animal diseases that continue to spread around the world, impacting economies and livelihoods. **Because diseases know no borders, sharing information about outbreaks between countries as early as possible can also make a huge difference in the control of a disease.** To ensure that animal health information can be accessible in a timely manner, one of WOAHA's core historical mission is the publication of health information notified by countries. **To this end, WOAHA created a data system which has evolved over time, from telegrams to the online platform known today as the World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS).** Since its launch in 2005, WAHIS has disseminated nearly 5,000 notifications helping countries promptly identify animal and human health threats, while implementing opportune control measures.

Setting international standards

To support disease control and possibly eradication while improving animal health and welfare, another one of WOAHA's core historical missions is the setting of international standards to ensure a safe trade of animals and animal products. By adopting a common set of standards for the first time in 1968 and updating them regularly to account for progresses made in science and technology, countries started to build the foundations for a global governance of animal health. ●

Evolving the animal health agenda



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Americas – 2023. Fishermen unload their catch at a fish market port. Aquatic animal health is crucial to WOA, as 800 million people depend on fisheries and aquaculture for their livelihoods.

The animal realm is not limited to production and terrestrial animals. Aquatic animals and wildlife also play a critical role in sustaining human livelihoods and a healthy environment. **800 million people depend on small-scale fisheries and aquaculture to live. Wildlife is essential to maintain balanced ecosystems, and biodiversity loss can set ripple effects through the environment, impacting other spheres such as human health.**

In the late 1960s, WOA began expanding its activities to include aquatic animals, and continues to make important strides in the introduction of wildlife to this day. By bringing together governments, industry and experts, the Organisation develops global strategies focused on transversal thematics like these ones.

Integrating animal welfare in WOA's mandate

A global strategy has also been developed to enhance animal welfare worldwide, recognising the mutual benefits between animal health and welfare. When animals are treated well, they are more productive and less susceptible to disease. **The consideration of animal welfare is an integral part for building sustainable food production systems.** Following countries' request, animal welfare was incorporated into WOA's mandate in the early 2000s. Because standards alone are not enough to advance this topic, the Organisation is working to build understanding that policies favouring animal welfare are a global asset, for animal and human health, the economy and the environment. ●

"Real-life input is critical to ensuring that WOA's work is based on farm level knowledge and science"

Ricardo Santin, president of the International Poultry Council

Supporting the humans behind animal health



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"Internationally, PVS recommendations serve as valuable insights for development agencies, such as the World Bank, to tailor their lending operations and technical assistance programs. These recommendations inform decision-making processes regarding resource allocation and project design, ensuring that interventions are targeted and aligned with national priorities."

Renaud Seligmann, World Bank Director for Strategy and Operations of the Sustainable Development Practice Group.

Africa – 1974. A member of the national Veterinary Services inoculates cattle to protect the entire herd from diseases. WOAAH supports veterinary workforces around the world through its capacity building activities.

Animal health relies on a system upheld by humans. Whether they are veterinarians, veterinary paraprofessionals, community animal health workers, researchers, data analysts, lab workers or members of veterinary authorities, all of them play a critical role in the global health system. Yet, their contribution to maintaining animal and human health, food safety and security, and balanced ecosystems, remains underrated.

As a result, the veterinary workforce faces challenges in terms of skills and resources. To address them, WOAAH developed

evaluation, capacity-building and partnership programmes in the 2000s which are still going strong today.

Addressing the gender gap in the veterinary workforce

WOAH also acknowledges that gender equality contributes to a better veterinary workforce. It brings diverse perspectives and talents to the field, enabling better access to veterinary services for all. Yet, studies suggest that there is still a long way to go to enable women's empowerment in the animal health sector. To better understand how gender impacts the work of the Organisation, a gender task force was established in 2021. This task force has already conducted studies to assess Veterinary Services from a gender perspective. ●



©WOAH/ TORAJ DAMAVANDI

Middle East – Year unknown. A mother and child walk with their sheep. Women account for 50–70% of workers in the livestock and aquatic sectors worldwide. Improving animal health provides women with stable incomes.



©WOAH/C.D.Y

Asia and the Pacific – 2014. Animal health workers visit remote villages to offer rabies vaccinations for cats and dogs, including strays. WOAHP provides a vaccine bank to enable access to quality vaccines.

Responding to critical global challenges

In our interconnected world, diseases that arise in one part of the globe can quickly spread and cause pandemics such as COVID-19. **Humans, animals and ecosystems are intertwined in a way that whatever affects one, affects the rest.** To respond to critical global challenges such as zoonotic diseases, the depletion of natural resources or food safety, working together across different fields is our only chance. For this reason, WOAHP has become the voice of animal health and the veterinary workforce in global One Health discussions, working in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Altogether, these organisations form the Quadripartite.

Coordinating our response to antimicrobial resistance

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is another example of a One Health challenge that needs to be addressed in a cross-sectoral, coordinated way. It threatens the efficacy of antimicrobial drugs, such as antibiotics. The discovery of penicillin by Alexander Fleming marked the beginning of modern medicine in 1928, and paved the way to better living conditions for humans and animals. **But today the unchecked spread of AMR could leave humanity once more defenseless in the face of infections and diseases.** WOAHP has been developing an international response to AMR with its partners and members. ●

"WOAHP takes a leadership role in tackling AMR. It shows that it matters, and that it is not only a concern of human health."

Dame Sally Davies, UK Special Envoy on antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

“ Back in 1924, nations recognised the importance of uniting behind a shared mission: to stop the spread of diseases such as rinderpest. A century later, in 2024, the same level of collaboration and solidarity is essential to tackle the challenges of today. Whether it’s responding to extreme weather events, addressing the threat of antimicrobial resistance, or preparing for pandemics, these challenges demand a collective and multi-sectoral approach. As WOAHP embarks on its second century, we are dedicated as ever to the global efforts for One Health, using our commitment to animal health and welfare as a foundation for creating a more sustainable future.”

Monique Éloit, WOAHP Director General

Looking forward: animal health and welfare tomorrow

After a century, what lies ahead? Artificial intelligence, climate change, pollution, ecosystem unbalance, biothreats... Today's rising trends may be tomorrow's reality, with consequences on food production systems, trade, and global health.

To preserve animal health and welfare in the long term, WOAHP prepares for the future today. In July 2023, the Organisation launched a participatory foresight project as part of its 100th anniversary celebrations. The goal: to leverage foresight and futures literacy methodologies for strategic thinking about the future.

Fishery-derived animals

Ocean acidification caused by climate change affects marine habitats and reduces fish populations, endangering fishermen's livelihoods and threatening the food security of communities dependent on marine resources. Declining fish populations can also lead to forced migrations of certain species to new habitats, disrupting local ecosystems.

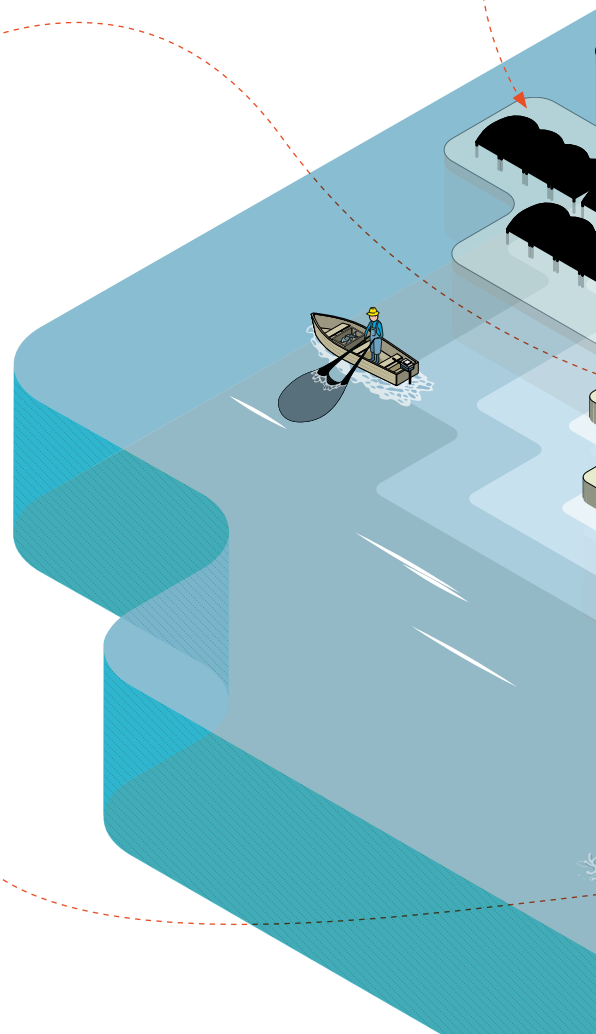
HOW CAN CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE?

Livestock

Because of climate change, natural disasters such as droughts, floods, and storms are more frequent and more violent. They can lead to the death of livestock, resulting in significant economic losses for farmers and undermining food security worldwide. Extreme weather conditions can drastically reduce the production of raw materials for animal feed. Extreme weather conditions can also directly affect animals, making them more susceptible to infectious diseases.

Terrestrial and aquatic wildlife

Climate change disrupts the natural habitats of terrestrial wildlife, leading to forced migrations, shrinking space, and intensifying conflict with humans over food, water and resources, which endangers the survival of many species. The rise of temperature of the world's oceans leads to coral bleaching, coastal habitat destruction, and declining fish populations. It causes the destruction of marine ecosystems and compromises the survival of many aquatic species. By compromising the health of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife, climate change stimulates the emergence of new zoonotic diseases and jeopardises food security and human livelihoods.



Access to Veterinary Services

With climate change, natural disasters are becoming increasingly violent and frequent. Hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods, can compromise animals' immune systems, leading to the spread of diseases. Natural disasters often damage existing veterinary infrastructures, leading to the closure of veterinary clinics and hospitals and difficult access to medication and vaccines. As a result, residents in these regions are faced with limited or non-existent access to emergency and routine veterinary care for their pets and farm animals. In these situations, animal health often takes a back seat.

Transportation disruptions

As natural disasters become more violent and frequent with climate change, transportation disruption can occur, hindering the movement of essential supplies including food, water, and medical resources for animals. This makes it challenging for veterinarians to reach affected areas promptly. As a result, animals may suffer from starvation, dehydration, or untreated injuries due to delayed medical attention. This situation shows the critical importance of rapid responses and coordination among authorities, relief agencies, and veterinary teams to ensure the timely delivery of essential resources and medical assistance to animals in crisis situations.

Companion animals

Heatwaves and extreme weather conditions can endanger the health and well-being of pets, increasing the risks of diseases and deaths, as well as healthcare costs for pet owners. Furthermore, shifts in weather patterns can lead to an increase in parasitic infestations and diseases, further exposing pets to health risks.



Our key One Health initiatives at regional level

Americas

Important strides in the fight against AMR

The Tripartite project "Working together to fight antimicrobial resistance (AMR)" has made considerable progress in the Americas. By improving regulation and surveillance, it has strengthened infection prevention and control. It has also enabled national laboratories to monitor AMR and report data. The project promoted public-private partnerships by training professionals in AMR prevention. It also focused on behaviour change in rural areas and encouraged the alignment of legislation with international standards. Finally, the project has enlarged its scope to prevent misuse of antimicrobials by reducing the risk of pandemics, notably by improving the capacities at national level for surveillance and diagnosis of diseases in wildlife. A well-designed animal disease surveillance system allows for preventive action and early detection of outbreaks at the human-animal-environment interface. Ultimately, this contributes to the fight against AMR by containing dangerous diseases.

Africa

A vaccine to mitigate AMR in Zimbabwe

As part of the Antimicrobial Resistance – Multi-Partner Trust Fund project (AMR-MPTF), WOAAH has supported Zimbabwe in the development of a vaccine against Theileriosis, a fatal tick-borne cattle disease, popularly known as *January Disease*. The project, launched in December 2021, aimed to counter the threat of AMR. With the production of the Theileriosis vaccine, called BOLVAC, Zimbabwe's animal health sector has achieved a breakthrough after years of effort. The first batch of 20,460 doses, produced in August 2022, marked an important milestone. WOAAH, in collaboration with its Quadripartite partners, continues to support Zimbabwe in promoting the use of the Theileriosis vaccine.



Europe

One Health education in Kazakhstan

WOAH and WHO actively encourage collaboration between sectors following a One Health approach. In Kazakhstan, they are supporting the integration of One Health principles into university curricula, particularly in public health and veterinary medicine programmes. WHO has developed educational materials for veterinary programs and, jointly with WOA, has organised a round table with the State Veterinary Authority and all veterinary faculties to discuss application methods. There are plans to strengthen collaboration between ministries, integrate a One Health module into educational programmes and set up cross-sectoral platforms. This successful partnership aims to provide training to multidisciplinary educational institutions to improve One Health skills.

Asia and the Pacific

Effective rabies control in Indonesia

Since July 2022, WOA has been working closely with the Asia Pacific Cities Alliance for Health and Development (APCAT) on a project to accelerate rabies prevention in Bali. With a fatality rate of almost 100% in humans and animals alike, rabies remains a global threat, killing approximately 59,000 people every year. Extended until August 2024, this partnership has produced considerable results. In particular, the dog vaccination rate has risen significantly from 35% to 80% in 2023, with effective coordination between government departments and local authorities ensuring a seamless supply of vaccines and a budget allocation for rabies control. In addition, local regulations have been established and adopted in Klungkung district, setting an example for the other provinces. WOA and APCAT continue to work on the development of a provincial rabies control strategy, all the while maintaining momentum through advocacy and ongoing partnerships.

Middle East

A network to enhance camel disease control

Created following regional and international discussions, the Camel Middle East Network (CAMENET) focuses on dromedary camel health and husbandry. Co-directed by WOA and FAO, it develops scientific and technological capacities for the epidemiology and diagnosis of camel diseases. CAMENET facilitates collaboration between Members and reference centers, particularly focusing on MERS-CoV, a zoonotic virus. This pathogen can be transmitted between animals and humans, causing a disease called the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). Activities include collaboration with WHO and participation in inter-regional workshops on MERS-CoV surveillance. The aim of these collaborations is to improve understanding of camel zoonotic diseases and related public health risks, encouraging inter-regional efforts using a One Health approach.

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2024. One hundred years into improving animal health and welfare, spectacular achievements have been made, but humbling challenges still lie ahead. The world stands at a crossroads. Now, more than ever, the critical role of the veterinary workforce in the global health agenda needs to be fully acknowledged. Because animal health is our health. It's everyone's health.

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