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Improving animal welfare to reduce the need for antimicrobials in farming

*Side event to the 92nd General Session of the World
Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)*

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Date: 27 May 2025, 12:50-13:50

Location: Maison de la Chimie (47 Rue Saint-Dominique, 75007 Paris, Room 233, In-person)

Convened by: International Coalition for Animal Welfare (ICFAW) and the AMR Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Platform (MSPP), Action Group on Animal Welfare-AMR Nexus

With support from: The World Federation for Animals (WFA) and FOUR PAWS
Moderated by Masika Sophie, Global Health Policy Manager, World Federation for Animals (WFA)

Speakers

- Julia Havenstein, Chair, International Coalition for Animal Welfare (ICFAW)
- Javier Yugueros-Marcos, Head of the AMR and Veterinary Products Department, World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)
- Junxia Song, Senior Animal Health Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- Huyam Ahmed Mohammed Elamin Salih, Director, African Union, Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR)
- Rebeca Garcia, Veterinary Advisor, Animal and Plant Health Agency, United Kingdom
- Wendla Beyer, Policy Officer, FOUR PAWS

Co-organized with:



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Background and Objective

This side event was organized on the margins of the 92nd General Session of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) meeting to explore the role of animal welfare in reducing the need for antimicrobials and strengthening antimicrobial resistance (AMR) prevention. Recognizing the interlinkages across sectors, the event emphasized a One Health approach—integrating human, animal, and environmental health—with animal welfare as a critical yet underrepresented element in AMR strategies.

The session convened around 50 representatives including WOAH Countries' Delegates, experts and stakeholders from international organizations, regional bodies, research and academia to share experiences, policy insights, and practical solutions.

Summary of key contributions

1. International Animal Welfare Guidelines and Implementation

The discussion opened with an overview of ongoing global efforts by ICFAW to support the development and implementation of animal welfare guidelines. These initiatives include collaboration with countries to integrate WOAH's standards into national frameworks, with the goal of improving on-farm conditions and reducing routine antimicrobial use. Javier Yugueros-Marcos (WOAH) highlighted that prevention is key - poor welfare compromises immune responses, leading to increased antimicrobial use (AMU). Updates to WOAH's animal welfare standards are expected to bolster responsible antimicrobial practices.

2. Animal Welfare as a cornerstone of AMR prevention

Speakers reaffirmed that animal welfare is foundational to effective AMR prevention strategies. Antimicrobials are often used to compensate for poor management conditions promoting poor animal welfare states. Stressful environments - such as overcrowding, inadequate feeding, and poor housing - predispose animals to illness, escalating AMU. The 2024 UN Political Declaration on AMR was commended for formally recognizing the central role of animal welfare, listing it under the pillar of prevention alongside vaccination.

Wendla Beyer (FOUR PAWS) underscored that good animal husbandry is a powerful lever for AMR reduction. She illustrated how better farming conditions (e.g., avoiding early weaning, ensuring proper feeding, reducing transport stress) can eliminate the need for antimicrobials, especially in intensive farming systems.

3. Role of FAO and the Quadripartite in the global AMR Governance

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) emphasized its role in coordinating the response to AMR in the agrifood sector and hosting the AMR Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Platform (AMR MSPP) on behalf of the Quadripartite organizations (FAO, UNEP, WHO and WOA). With over 250 stakeholders across sectors, the platform helps co-create, harness and promote concrete solutions to AMR across the One Health sectors. Its 13 Action Groups proposed and led by members, applying a bottom-up approach, are initiatives spanning integrated surveillance, stewardship across the One Health sectors, financing, awareness raising, capacity building, among others.

Additionally, FAO's mandate is to ensure food security and the sustainability of our agrifood systems, and the speaker flagged critical gaps in many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), including weak regulation, limited diagnostic capacity, and antimicrobial use without veterinary oversight.

The FAO's RENOFARM 10-year initiative is a practical solution, aiming to embed animal welfare in farm-level practices, increase resilience, and reduce antimicrobial dependence. Noting that for national-level implementation, it relies on collaboration between the Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) and public-private sector. The "knowledge-to-action" gap was highlighted in the AMR response and the FAO's Farmer Field Schools (FFS) activities were referenced as a practical approach to bridging this divide at the community level.

4. Regional perspectives from Africa

The African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) presented the Animal Welfare Strategy for Africa (AWSA), focusing on three objectives:

- Raising awareness and promoting behavior change;
- Strengthening effective practices aligned with One Health and One Welfare principles;
- Catalyzing investments in animal welfare.

Collaboration remains key in Africa especially with Africa Center for Disease Control (CDC) and national focal points even though implementation remains uneven across the region. Key action areas include digital One Health mapping, information dissemination, capacity building, and partnerships. The importance of aligning with the UN General Assembly (UNGA) political declaration on AMR and supporting the SDGs was noted.

5. UK National Strategy: 20 Years of Vision and Practice

The UK's longstanding AMR strategy was highlighted, which integrates nine ambitions, including protecting animal health and welfare. Though animal welfare is not always explicitly stated, it is embedded in key areas such as biosecurity, farm management, and education. Four strategic pillars - Academia, Governance, Industry, and Civil Society - form the basis for action. Practical examples illustrated how data on welfare indicators have been able to inform surveillance and antimicrobial stewardship. Emphasis was placed on embedding animal welfare in veterinary curricula, enhancing AMU literacy, and improving on-farm decision-making. The UK's cross-sector collaboration platforms, such as RUMA (Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture), were noted as good practice.

Key Takeaways

- Prevention!Prevention!Prevention! – Improving animal welfare is not just an ethical imperative, but a scientifically supported pathway to reducing antimicrobial use and resistance.
- Multisectoral collaboration is essential – across veterinary, public health, agriculture, and education sectors.
- The One Health and One Welfare frameworks provide scalable entry points for integrated AMR solutions.
- Data and surveillance must incorporate animal welfare indicators to inform policy and practice.
- Capacity building and education, especially in LMICs, are central to sustainable change.
- More field experiences are needed on antimicrobial misuse and contamination, so that there is greater emphasis on awareness and strengthening animal health systems.
- Antimicrobial use often receives less policy attention than resistance, despite being a key driver of the problem. Greater focus is needed on how antimicrobials are used, not just the outcomes of resistance..

Further reference: UK Presentation: “Animal Welfare in the UK AMR Strategy”

