

Animal Welfare in Finland

Abstract based on the "Animal Welfare in Finland 2016" report, with updates

Interest in animal welfare is growing and expanding. Today, in addition to animal experts, the debate on animal welfare is receiving attention from a variety of parties, including many operators in the arts and commerce, as well as from active citizens. That said, it is still difficult to form an overall picture of animal welfare, as the information on animals and their care and handling is fragmented and partly one-sided. The purpose of the Animal Welfare in Finland report is to provide a wide range of independent and reliable information on animal welfare and to monitor the progress of animal welfare in Finland. Improving animal welfare requires effective cooperation between many different operators. We in Finland have excellent conditions for this.

Welfare is an individual animal's experience

Welfare is an animal's experience of its own mental and physical state. With this in mind, animal welfare is defined by three Finnish animal welfare councils set up by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Animal welfare can be enhanced by removing negative things from the animal's life, such as pain and fear. Conversely, welfare is enhanced by adding positive things to the animal's life, such as pleasurable experiences.

Animal welfare to appear in the national curriculum for the first time

In the new foundations of the basic national curriculum, animal welfare has been raised for the first time as a subject to be taught in primary and secondary education. There is a need to update basic education materials and teachers' information on animal welfare. University animal welfare education has decreased, as the University of Eastern Finland has stopped teaching and researching animal welfare science. Finland still lacks a university-level degree in animal welfare.

Animal welfare research is becoming increasingly multidisciplinary

The need for research on animal welfare has increased and continues to grow. Nowadays, animal welfare research is well established and becoming increasingly multidisciplinary. Dozens of animal welfare researchers have graduated in recent years. Social and cultural research on animal welfare is being carried out more and more, and the Finnish Society for Human-Animal Studies, YKES, is very active.

Compensation related to animal welfare is expanding

Agricultural subsidies are important for the profitability of Finnish animal production, and the popularity of animal welfare compensation has increased among producers. Poultry, sheep and goat farmers, like farmers of pigs and cattle, can also claim compensation.

Human nutrition, the environment and animal welfare are linked

Citizens have the opportunity make choices about the welfare of chickens when purchasing eggs, since the eggs have labels that indicate the conditions under which the chickens are kept. There is also a new way of producing eggs in Finland, known as "free range" production. For many other animal products, purchasing decisions based on animal welfare are difficult because of the lack of a quality system that emphasises welfare.

In recent years, there have been heated discussions on substitutes for food of animal origins, such as artificial meat and vegetable-based meat substitutes. There is interest in the potential use of insects as human and animal feed. It would be desirable to increase the consumption, production and processing of plant proteins. Nutrition recommendations call for using less red meat and replacing it with poultry and vegetable proteins. Reducing meat consumption has also become a central topic of

discussion in the climate debate. Changes in people's eating habits have an important impact on animal welfare.

The post of Animal Protection Ombudsman was in place for a fixed period

Finland's first animal protection ombudsman was in office from 12 August 2013 to 31 December 2015. The post was not renewed after its end date, but according to the new Government's Programme, the post of Animal Welfare Ombudsman will be re-established. The Council on the Protection of Animals Used for Scientific or Educational Purposes began its work, and the other two animal welfare Councils set up by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Finland, the Council for Farm Animal Welfare and the Council for Companion and Hobby Animal Welfare, are continuing their work.

The first Finnish Citizens' Initiative discussed in Parliament in 2013 concerned the abolition of fur farming in Finland. The initiative was not approved by Parliament.

New Animal Welfare Act in the pipeline

In recent years, national animal welfare legislation has focused on the preparation of a new Animal Welfare Act covering all animals. The new law is largely in the pipeline but was not discussed in Parliament during the previous Government's term. The new Government Programme states that the construction of new tie stall barns for cattle will be abandoned. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is preparing a Government Decree on the welfare of fur animals.

Animal welfare inspections based on suspicion have increased

The animal welfare deficiencies found in inspections of livestock farms and animal transport are quite similar and significant from year to year. In 2017–2018, sampling checks on cattle, pigs, broiler chickens and fur animals showed deficiencies at an average of one fifth of the holdings checked. The most deficiencies have been uncovered at fur farms. The most common deficiencies in animal transport are related to permits and documentation and thus do not directly affect animal welfare.

The increase in the number of municipal control veterinarians has led to an increase in the number of animal welfare inspections based on suspicion concerning pet animals in particular. More serious animal welfare failures have been uncovered in pet facilities than in those where farmed animals are kept. The number of people convicted of animal welfare offences and banned from keeping animals has increased in recent years. The number of animal protection notifications to the police has also increased slightly.

Work is being done to promote voluntary measures to improve animal welfare

In Finland, the industry actively collects and utilises information on the welfare of farmed animals. The national swine and bovine health care systems SIKAVA and NASEVA help to prevent disease in farmed animals and improve animal husbandry conditions. Finland's high level of animal health and freedom from a number of infectious animal diseases that occur elsewhere are partly due to these systems. The SIKAVA system for pig farms has led to the development of a national Quality Responsibility System that reflects the minimum legal requirements for better pig health.

The local activities of SEY, the Finnish Federation for Animal Welfare Associations, provide concrete assistance to pets in need, most of which are abandoned cats. SEY also has an extensive network of animal welfare advisers. Help for injured wildlife in Finland is still largely based on volunteering.