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**WORLD VETERINARY
ASSOCIATION (AISBL)**Avenue de Tervueren 12
1040 Brussels, Belgium

T +32 2 533 70 22

E secretariat@worldvet.orgwww.worldvet.org

WVA Position on the Global Climate Change Emergency

Background:

In November 2019, more than 11,000 scientists from around the world published a commentary declaring that human, animal, and ecosystem health were facing an immediate threat, and declaring climate change a global emergency. The impact of this global climate emergency on animal health and welfare is complex, with both direct and indirect effects.¹ Direct effects are due principally to altered temperatures, rising ocean levels, and increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events (e.g., hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons, tornadoes, droughts, floods, lightning storms and strikes). Temperature stress affects the physiological activities of animals and may result in vulnerability to diseases and decreased productivity. The indirect effects of climate change on animal health and welfare include changing patterns of vector-borne diseases and wildlife migration, as well as increasing levels of mycotoxin production in animal feed, and parasitic disease burdens in animals. The impact of climate change on animal agriculture can be seen in reduced animal growth rates and productivity in pastoral systems and decreases in food security in dry lands and high mountain regions.²

The United Nations 2019 Climate Action Summit reinforced the concept that a 1.5°C increase in global temperatures by the end of the 21st century, compared with those in the preindustrial era (1850-1900), is the safe upper limit of global warming. Moreover, to not exceed this upper limit, the world needs to work to achieve net-zero global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.³ Although the contribution of animal agriculture to global climate change is significantly less than that of other industries (e.g., transportation, construction, and energy), animal production does influence climate change through the emission of greenhouse gases such as methane, nitrous oxide, and carbon dioxide. As such, changes in specific animal production practices may provide opportunities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, as well as increasing greenhouse gas

¹ Nicola Lacetera, Impact of climate change on animal health and welfare, *Animal Frontiers*, Volume 9, Issue 1, January 2019, Pages 26–31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/af/vfy030>

² IPCC, 2019: Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems* [P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, E. Calvo Buendia, V. Masson-Delmotte, H.- O. Pörtner, D. C. Roberts, P. Zhai, R. Slade, S. Connors, R. van Diemen, M. Ferrat, E. Haughey, S. Luz, S. Neogi, M. Pathak, J. Petzold, J. Portugal Pereira, P. Vyas, E. Huntley, K. Kissick, M. Belkacemi, J. Malley, (eds.)]. In press.

³ Report of the Secretary-General on the 2019 Climate Action Summit and the Way Forward in 2020, United Nations, 11 December 2019, https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/assets/pdf/cas_report_11_dec.pdf (accessed May 5, 2020).

sequestration.⁴ Utilization of best practices and environmental sustainability criteria for animal production, which may include both intensive and smallholder farming systems, provides numerous benefits for the continued health of animals, humans, and ecosystems.

WVA Position:

Veterinarians, in their role as advocates for animal health and welfare and public health, have a responsibility to protect ecosystem health and demand action to minimize climate change. Globally, veterinarians actively contribute to climate change mitigation and environmental protection in many ways, including, but not limited to, advising on acceptable use of resources (feed, manure and animal by-products) and the appropriate handling of medical waste.

Therefore, the World Veterinary Association (WVA):

1. Acknowledges climate change as a global emergency and encourages research, surveillance, and education to increase knowledge and understanding of the drivers and impacts of climate change on animal, human, and ecosystem health.
2. Supports a One Health approach⁵ to address climate change and calls for coordination and collaboration among stakeholders to mitigate its detrimental consequences on animal, human, and ecosystem health.
3. Urges members of the veterinary profession to research, review and adopt practices that minimize greenhouse gas emissions.
4. Supports continued research into and adoption of modern, efficient, and sustainable food and animal production techniques that will improve animal health and welfare, reduce the effects of climate change, and improve food security globally.
5. Urges its Member Associations to build and enhance veterinary capacity within their country and region to prevent and address consequences associated with climate change, including treatment of domestic animals and wildlife affected by extreme weather events, prevention of emerging and re-emerging diseases, and potential alterations in animal production systems with priority on animal welfare and the lowest possible environmental impact.
6. Supports the strengthening of agricultural surveillance and other mitigating measures in agriculture, with emphasis on the role of the veterinary profession in improving animal and public health.

⁴ Oyhantçabal, W., Vitale, E., Lagarmilla, P., 2010. Climate change and links to animal diseases and animal production. Compendium of technical items presented to the OIE World Assembly of Delegates and to OIE Regional Commissions, 169–186.

⁵ World Veterinary Association Position on One Health, 2016, http://www.worldvet.org/uploads/docs/wva_position_on_one_health.pdf (accessed May 5, 2020).