Animal Welfare: Legislation, Issues, And Cases In Russia And Eastern Europe

Animal welfare has become a huge topic of discussion as of late. From an agricultural perspective in the Midwest, the fear of farms being viewed as harmful to animals drives advocacy and transparency forward in terms of showing the public why practices are safe for animals. This educational aspect has proven as just one form of ensuring our animal welfare standards in the United States are in check with public views. However, globally, the issue has taken several forms. Dating back to 1635 when the country of Ireland passed its first animal protection law forbidding “plowing by the tayle and pulling wool off live sheep,” animal welfare has become a topic of interest around the world ever since (Lin). Through the history of animal welfare globally and a closer look at specific legislation, issues, and cases in Russia and Eastern Europe, animal welfare can be better understood on both regional and global scales.

While the topics of animal protection, welfare, and rights often gets confused, it is important to understand the purpose of certain animals and how their treatment is considered based on their specific purpose. For example, livestock are treated humanely by farmers and ranchers through a variety of practices; however, some animal rights activists claim that butchering of these livestock is not humane. Animal welfare pertains to the humane treatment of these animals, but this cannot distract from the animal’s overall purpose to feed our growing world population. Animal welfare has come a long way worldwide. With researched practices into the humane treatment of livestock especially, we can effectively and humanely develop practices to produce healthy animals that are butchered in a humane way and are full of nutrients and healthy lifestyle options for consumers. Developing such practices has been a huge part of animal welfare in the livestock sector especially.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), “Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives” (Animal Welfare: What Is It?). The World Organization of Animal Health defines animal welfare as “Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress” (“World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)”). Welfare encompasses disease prevention and treatment, proper nutrition, humane slaughter, and adequate shelter. It remains the responsibility of animal caretakers. The entire concept of animal welfare is often skewed; oftentimes many think of animal rights activists and their causes in terms of animal welfare, as is evidenced by many of the cases to be examined in this essay. However, animal welfare also relates to animal agriculture in providing proper care, medicine, nutrition, shelter, and other needs to these animals. While many of the following cases may appear as to not have a direct tie to agriculture, the indirect impacts of the principles set forth by these legislations could have future implications.

While the AVMA is an American association, these principles hold true in Easter European countries as well; animal law was developed in Europe 200 years ago. According to Animal Law Legal Center, a version of the European Union began passing laws requiring animals to be confirmed unconscious before slaughtering. The EU passed several other reforms mandating

animal treatment, such as banning battery cages for hens. According to the same Animal Law article, eastern European countries began entering the EU at a later time, and their membership restricted the ability of the other European countries to pass more animal rights laws after 2003 (Pederson). However, more recently, one Eastern European country, Slovakia, has developed an increased concern for animal rights. Laco Durkovic, the leader of Sloboda Zvierat, which means Freedom of Animals, was interviewed and published in Renaissance Universal to explain the movement he created in 1992. The organization's main areas of work include campaigns against meat-eating, fur, circuses, and mistreatment of animals, lobbying to create laws to protect animals, and creating animal shelters across the country (Gottstein). Organizations such as these prove how animal welfare and treatment viewpoints vary from country to country and industry to industry. As expected, this organization speaks against the agriculture industry in various formats, especially in terms of creating campaigns against eating meat. However, the country of Slovakia still works to improve animal welfare in favor of the agriculture sector through the European Union as well. According to an article from the Slovak Spectator, farmers in the country received rural development aid that enables them to carry out measures in animal welfare elements in addition to environmental and food quality elements too (Ferguson). Movements such as these that enable the progression of animal welfare in terms of methods that promote the agriculture industry are important to the overall impact of animals to the industry. Animal welfare in the agriculture and food industries can be promoted through such facets as vaccinations, antibiotics, humane slaughtering, clean water, improved nutrition standards, and more. Such movements in areas with little past progression bring more improvements to the region.

The largest country in the region, Russia, deserves much examination on the animal welfare topic. In February 2019, Russia passed legislation to improve animal welfare. This legislation also targets pets, petting zoo animals, animals housed in bars, animal fights, and killing strays. This legislation places no major implication on animal agriculture, it does point out how there is no legislation applying to wildlife, fish farming, hunting, or the use of farm and lab animals (Smith). This implies how more leniency is found in the agriculture sector and less attention is placed on combatting farm practices and treatments, as is often the case in the United States. More focus on animal treatment in companion animal cases takes negative attention off the farm and food sector. However, this also means how few legislation is currently in place to maintain proper treatment of farm animals. The subject of what the future of animal welfare within agriculture still remains up for debate.

When examining Russian legislation in terms of animal welfare, the fact that cannot be ignored in the country includes efforts made to protect animals in areas that not everyone may agree with. For example, a bill proposed in Russian Parliament in 2015 included banning the "quality control of perfumes, cosmetics, and their ingredients on animals" (MCDOUGALL). Within the same article, the present fact of few animal rights laws being in place is brought up, with activists pressuring such a bill be put in place. However, without animal testing, product safety becomes a major concern, threatening the safety of consumers alike. In terms of any animal rights legislation, the question of the value of whose safety comes into play often. With the passage of such a bill, potentially dangerous materials could be placed on the market in Russia, harming people rather than animals. Whose safety is more important to the citizens? Questions such as this come down to research: What other alternative methods exist to replace animal testing but enhance product safety for these products. While more expensive of an approach, such methods must be taken into consideration for the welfare of both animals and humans alike. Animal welfare bills such as this one in Russia bring up a global safety issue that must be

properly confronted before such bills can ethically be passed into law.

Legislation regarding protecting animals used in farming do exist in Russia. General anti-cruelty provisions are in place that apply to animals, but no extra provisions have been created or enacted in addition to the code. The European Union's trade relationships have a partial impact on animal welfare in terms of exports: "a detailed system for official controls to meet community standards for poultry meat and poultry meat products intended for export to the EU has not yet been put in place" ("World Animal Protection"). No government commitment to policy work in the animal welfare sector is apparent, therefore diminishing the value of creating systems of control in Russia when examining trade relationships. In fact, the country's focus on exports includes crops, with very few animals or meat products being exported at all.

The future of animal welfare in the agriculture industry could have multiple facets. The slowing down of creating animal welfare regulations in Europe and the little existence of any in Russia in terms of evidence proves that humane animal treatment has not been of major concern over the last several years. In countries where livestock is not the prevalent source of income from trade, animal welfare is not of huge concern. However, what does this mean in regard to what is not discussed or known? If not mandates, what is currently occurring in farming livestock systems in Eastern Europe and Russia? While little evidence exists on these countries, it is evidenced that its citizens do not show concern as United States' citizens have shown an increased interest in. Through organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals in America, animal treatment in farming and companion animal systems alike constantly receive backlash from spectators regarding what does and does not look safe to their eye. However, it must be recognized that animal welfare is often misconstrued by this public eye. Those in livestock production systems are entrusted with animals' treatment every day. Through education of the public, proper animal treatment can become a universal factor that does not become misconstrued by false information or without proper explanation. Animal welfare in agriculture relies on the trusted professionals in the industry caring for the world's food every day.