

World Conference on Farm Animal Welfare

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Speech given by Yu Kangzhen, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture of the People's Republic of China

Dear Guests, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today we come together to attend the World Conference on Farm Animal Welfare and to explore and discuss the theme of promoting farm animal welfare. I believe that this conference will make a great contribution to promoting the greener development of China's livestock industry. On behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, I would like to offer our warmest congratulations on the convening of this conference! And I extend a very warm welcome to delegates from all over the world and participating international organisations.

Promoting animal welfare is an essential outcome of economic and social development. In my opinion, the continuous improvement of human civilization is mainly reflected in an increasing concern for life, resources and the environment, and the growing importance attached to the harmonious development between humankind and nature. Over the past two centuries, human beings have gradually reached a consensus about promoting animal welfare. This is due largely to new stages of economic and social development, whereby more attention is paid to our concerns as humans, and our striving for more environmentally sustainable development, with an emphasis on food safety. Promoting animal welfare has become not only an important choice for the green development of agriculture and a significant measure to ensure food safety and healthy consumption, but even more so an important embodiment of human caring in modern society.

Promotion of animal welfare should not proceed faster than a country's current stage of economic and social development. Promoting animal welfare does not mean opposing the use of animals, but rather using animals more scientifically, more safely and more humanely, bringing better benefits for human development. In the early 19th century when humans had just begun to concern themselves more with the question of animal welfare, promoting animal welfare was simply concerned with two aspects: the freedom from hunger and the freedom from cruelty. By the early 20th century, besides avoidance of hunger and abuse, promoting animal welfare also implied treating animals with kindness. Not until the 1970s was attention turned to the importance of freedom from pain and suffering. In the 21st century, an animal's psychological health and the free expression of its natural behaviour have been gradually included as components of animal welfare. All of these changes happened in

conjunction with improvements in economic and social development. Currently, the content of animal welfare has been further extended to include a range of aspects such as comfortable living environment, adequate nutrition, minimising disease, mental health and free expression of natural behaviour. Hence, the promotion of animal welfare is an objective requirement for the development of human society. At the same time, in discussing animal welfare problems we should avoid dealing in absolutes, or politicising the issues, and even more importantly we must take into account our resources, the cultural environment and level of economic and social development. Significant variations exist between different regions, countries and nations in terms of their stages of economic and social development as well as their natural resources and cultural environments. Therefore, there will be tremendous differences between both the content and models used in promoting animal welfare. We should not use only one standard or model to evaluate animal welfare conditions in different nations, countries and regions. More importantly, animal welfare cannot be elevated in an unconditional or unprincipled way to an importance above the welfare of humans, beyond the prevailing socio-economic stage of development, without regard for the realities of the availability of resources, cultural environment and other factors.

A great effort has been made for animal welfare improvement in China and a great deal of significant progress has been achieved. Chinese traditional culture has always advocated the concept of raising and using animals with an attitude of love and appreciation. In the early sixth century, it was clearly set out in *'Qimin Yaoshu'* that 'in the use of an ox in the field and the riding of a horse, the individual animal's strength should be taken into account, water and feed should be provided according to the season, and to the natural needs of the animal'. It illustrates that the care for animals used for farming was appreciated in China even at that time. In the early fourteenth century, *'Wangzhen Nongshu'* pointed out directly that people should be kind to animals instead of taking them for granted. 'Farmers who are good at raising animals first need to understand compassion for them, so as to eliminate thoughts of mistreating them.' Today, China is committed to the development of green agriculture. At the heart of this is the improvement of both animal health, and the quality and safety of livestock products. Systematic arrangements and considerations for animal welfare promotion have been developed and the concept of animal welfare has been fully reflected and implemented in production development and related policies and laws. In terms of housing, full emphasis has been given to improving ventilation and light provision, and the control of temperature and humidity, and to decreasing stocking densities and increasing comfort for animals. When it comes to feed, the requirements of the needs of animals at different stages of growth should be fully considered, feed formulas should be accurate and the level of scientific understanding of animal feeding should be improved. In terms of kindness to animals, we should enhance the prevention and control of animal diseases, and the management of transportation and slaughter, carrying out research, actively developing education and training on animal welfare and participating in international events, to create good policy and

a societal atmosphere for promoting animal welfare. To date, 56 livestock companies in China have been awarded the “Good Production Awards” by Compassion in World Farming. Healthy and ecological livestock farming ‘with Chinese characteristics’ has been widely recognised around the world, and has become an important approach and a practical model in the development of welfare-friendly husbandry.

It’s a historic task for all the stakeholders in the Chinese animal husbandry industry to promote animal welfare with an overarching plan in the process of China’s economic and social development. China is one of the world’s major developing countries and likewise has a major responsibility in the world’s peaceful development. We will align with the objective requirements for economic and social development and vigorously promote work on animal welfare. Firstly, we need to accelerate the development of animal welfare technical standards and regulations. Relying on social organisations and industry bodies involved in self-regulation, we will conduct in-depth animal welfare scientific research in the Chinese context, develop standards and regulations, carry out advocacy and promotion, gradually perfecting our systems of animal welfare inspection, assessment and supervision. Secondly, we need to actively explore the approaches for animal welfare legislation. We will accelerate the process of animal welfare legislation, when appropriate adding to and amending the relevant provisions of existing laws and regulations, while at the same time facilitating the development of comprehensive new legislation and regulation for the promotion of animal welfare. Thirdly, we will take farm animal welfare as an approach to promoting the green and sustainable development of the farming industry. Currently, the Chinese livestock industry is facing a critical period of transformation and upgrading. Hence, we must proceed from where China is now, and enhance our advocacy and guidance work to take farm animal welfare promotion as the important approach for this transformation and upgrading, to promote a route for environmentally friendly sustainable development with high levels of efficiency, product safety and economic use of resources. Fourthly, we will continually enhance international communication and collaboration. In line with the major trends of globalisation and internationalisation, we will persevere in reform and opening up to the outside world, constantly absorb and learn all concepts and methods which include animal welfare that help us to promote the green development of agriculture in China. We will actively improve collaboration and communication with other organisations and countries on animal welfare research, standards, regulations, procedures etc., and share successful experiences in promoting animal welfare. We will actively participate in the development of world animal welfare standards and together commit to maintaining a just and fair environment for trade in livestock products, and promote globally the improvement and implementation of animal welfare and other concepts of green development for the better welfare of human beings.

I wish everyone a successful conference! Thank you very much!