



# USDA ANIMAL CARE

Strategic Plan, 2016-2020

## Acknowledgements

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## A Message from the Deputy Administrator

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Fifty years ago, in 1966, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) into law. Since that time, USDA, acting through Animal Care (AC) and its predecessors, has safeguarded and improved the welfare of millions of animals. Over that half-century, the tools AC uses to promote animal welfare have changed, but the importance of that critical mission has not. Everything AC does – everything our valuable employees do – is to ensure the humane treatment of vulnerable animals.

As we celebrate 50 years of the AWA, 45 years of protecting horses under the Horse Protection Act (HPA), and, most recently, protecting animals and the public by ensuring the safety and well-being of animals during disasters, I want to assure you that our critical mission – ensuring the humane treatment of vulnerable animals – remains at the heart of everything we do.

Key to achieving that mission is, of course, a focus on the animals themselves. But in our focus on them, we cannot overlook the importance of our relationships with people. Whether it's our hard-working dedicated AC employees, or the valuable relationships we've built with those we regulate and our stakeholders and partners, improving how we work and interact with people improves outcomes for animals. They're intertwined.

We want to engage our employees while learning from their experiences and empowering them to grow. And we want a workforce that reflects the people we serve. We want AC to be the top choice for veterinarians, animal health technicians, and many others who are looking for meaningful careers.

We want to engage the public and those we regulate – who we view as critical partners in everything we do. We want to leverage our relationships with partners and stakeholders to enhance animal welfare in the United States and globally. We want to identify new strategies and new partnerships so all understand their role in our important mission and that they, too, feel empowered to advance animal welfare.

We want to help advance the ever-growing base of knowledge of science and technology. Every year, we know more about animal welfare and husbandry practices, and we have more sophisticated methods to assess and measure animal welfare. We want to share what we know and what we're learning with others. When we achieve this, Animal Care will be the go-to organization for animal welfare issues in this country.

The strategic vision outlined in this plan combined with the efforts of AC's many dedicated employees will help us reach our goals. I am confident that, by working together and engaging the regulated community and the public, we will continue to improve the welfare of the more than two million regulated animals who are under the care of research facilities, breeders, dealers, exhibitors, and transporters, as well as horse owners and trainers; and we will improve the safety and well-being of animals and their owners when they are affected by disaster.

I look forward to working with all of you in the coming years to advance our critical mission.

Bernadette Juarez  
*Deputy Administrator*

## Animal Care's Mission

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Our mission is to ensure the humane treatment of vulnerable animals.



## Animal Care's Vision

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USDA's Animal Care Program will be recognized as a trusted national steward and global partner for the advancement of animal welfare.

## Our Goals and Objectives

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Animal Care (AC) has two key strategic goals that will enable us to accomplish our mission and achieve our vision for the organization over the next five years:

### **Goal 1. Engage Employees and the Public to Promote Animal Welfare.**

#### **Objective A. Foster a Unified, Inclusive, and High-Performing Workforce.**

- Achieve a true cultural transformation in AC that improves workplace climate and job satisfaction. Partner with employees to improve organizational performance, diversify employee recruitment and career-advancement opportunities, foster employee retention, and promote a positive work-life balance.
- Build a leadership team that creates an environment in which employees feel truly valued, empowered, and engaged.
- Invest in AC employees through coordinated, mission-aligned development opportunities, giving them the opportunity to advance their learning and grow their skills.
- Establish a culture of safety that will ensure the safety and security of AC employees.
- Enhance workplace performance by leveraging existing and emerging technologies.

#### **Objective B. Develop and Sustain Relationships that Facilitate Engagement with Partners, the Regulated Community, Stakeholders, and the General Public to Advance Animal Welfare.**

- Ensure transparency in all our activities and improve the communication of our priorities and accomplishments to earn the confidence of the public and those we represent.
- Promote animal welfare by delivering services, materials, and information to the public and those we regulate through cooperation with key partners.
- Build strong partnerships and increased outreach and learning opportunities for the regulated community to improve compliance and increase animal welfare.

### **Goal 2. Promote Animal Welfare.**

#### **Objective A. Optimize the Health and Well-Being of Animals.**

- Use all available tools to promote the welfare of animals we regulate: regulatory authorities, non-regulatory solutions, research and science, education and outreach, inspection, and enforcement.
- Ensure those caring for regulated animals understand their responsibilities and animal welfare needs.
- Support emergency planning and preparedness that benefits animal welfare, and improve deployment readiness of AC personnel to capably meet emergency programs mission requirements, APHIS deployments, and FEMA mission assignments.

#### **Objective B. Eliminate the Cruel and Inhumane Practice of Soring in Horses.**

- Enhance AC's ability to eliminate the soring of horses and restore fair competition.

## Actions in Support of Animal Care's Goals

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### GOAL 1, OBJECTIVE A: ENGAGE EMPLOYEES AND OTHERS TO PROMOTE ANIMAL WELFARE BY FOSTERING A UNIFIED, INCLUSIVE AND HIGH-PERFORMING WORKFORCE

➤ Achieve a true cultural transformation in Animal Care that improves workplace climate and job satisfaction. Partner with employees to improve organizational performance, diversify employee recruitment and career-advancement opportunities, foster employee retention, and promote a positive work-life balance.

- Implement the Cultural Transformation Action Plan developed by the AC Cultural Reformation Team.
- Invest in opportunities that allow AC to connect across all units as a single organization, including providing opportunities for employees to connect through in-person meetings and training.
- Conduct a capacity and investment analysis to determine whether and how AC may shift resources, as necessary, to accomplish priority objectives.
- Complete the hiring practices assessments and implement the associated recommendations from both APHIS' Human Resources Division and Program and Policy Development, and support the Administrator's strategic recruitment plan to build a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- Target efforts to improve AC's results on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey with a goal of improving the number of questions deemed a challenge by at least 50 percent (from 28 questions in FY 2015 to 14-15 questions in FY 2020).

➤ Build a leadership team that creates an environment in which employees feel truly valued, empowered, and engaged.

- Hold regular, productive meetings with clear agendas and decision points that result in action items that are tracked through completion; share the minutes of those meetings with all of AC.
- Prepare an end-of-year summary of AC activities that recognizes employee accomplishments.
- Hold quarterly AC-wide webinars to provide organizational updates and open a forum of exchange for employees.
- Develop and maintain current standard operating procedures for AC business processes and the Inspection Guide.
- Fully support the efforts of the Employee Engagement Committee and the Cultural Reformation Team.

➤ Invest in Animal Care employees through coordinated, mission-aligned development opportunities, giving them the opportunity to advance their learning and grow their skills.

- Develop and periodically update both learning and succession plans to assess skill and development needs to ensure continued success of AC.
- Empower all employees to identify and address professional developmental needs through their Individual Development Plans.
- Encourage employees to pursue coaching and mentoring opportunities to improve their skills and identify growth opportunities.
- Establish a program that identifies and supports outside learning opportunities to build specialized knowledge to advance regulated animal welfare and animal emergency management.
- Develop methods to ensure the value of learning and development opportunities so those programs selected to add value to AC employees and advance animal welfare.

➤ Establish a culture of safety that will ensure the safety and security of Animal Care employees.

- Develop and deploy enhanced safety and security training tailored to AC-specific issues.
- Establish a Standard Operating Procedure with the Emergency Management, Safety, and Security Division and others in APHIS and the Department on handling security issues involving AWA and HPA inspections; align AC's internal guidance to promote consistency with the SOP.
- Provide AC employees with communications training to promote productive exchanges with regulated persons and the public, and create an open environment for learning even when the conversation may involve noncompliance.
- Provide training to AC employees on documenting and reporting instances where they encounter verbal abuse, harassment, etc., while carrying out official duties and aggressively pursue action.
- Optimize AC's Continuity of Operations Planning by updating and maintaining a current Continuity of Operations plan, ensuring AC has redundant systems in place to promote continuity of operations, and ensuring employees understand their roles in emergency or disasters when faced with business continuity challenges.

➤ Enhance workplace performance by leveraging existing and emerging technologies.

- Ensure AC employees are telework-ready and that they have reliable, functional equipment to carry out their jobs.
- Develop transparent and readily understood metrics and dashboards to allow AC managers to assess and manage business activities.
- Support access to databases, SharePoint and other technologies to improve the ability to conduct core work and facilitate reporting.
- Identify and develop mechanisms for ready data access about AWA-regulated facilities for use during emergencies and disasters and other routine business purposes (including mapping, animal inventories, etc.).

**GOAL 1, OBJECTIVE B: ENGAGE EMPLOYEES AND OTHERS TO PROMOTE ANIMAL WELFARE BY DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS THAT FACILITATE ENGAGEMENT WITH PARTNERS, THE REGULATED COMMUNITY, STAKEHOLDERS, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC TO ADVANCE ANIMAL WELFARE.**

**➤Ensure transparency in all our activities and improve the communication of our priorities and accomplishments to earn the confidence of the public and those we represent.**

- Refresh and reorganize the AC website to make information more readily available and user friendly.
- Ensure website content is current and meets the diverse needs of AC employees, the public, and our stakeholders.
- Regularly update stakeholders and the public about key AC priorities and accomplishments.
- Improve response time to Freedom of Information Act requests and public complaints and continue to identify issues that can be proactively shared with the public.
- Develop a website module aimed at educating children on the AWA, HPA, emergency programs, and related careers.

**➤Promote animal welfare by delivering services, materials, and information to the public and those we regulate through cooperation with key partners.**

- Collaborate with other units within APHIS to advance animal welfare, including with APHIS Veterinary Services on efforts to mitigate the effects of foreign and emerging animal diseases in susceptible species in AWA-regulated facilities.
- Serve as an integral partner in the I-CARE program, integrate active learning techniques into outreach and internal training, and use metrics to assess compliance progress.
- Work collaboratively to clarify roles and responsibilities in national policy documents, plans, guidance documents and other materials.
- Engage the industry, stakeholders, partners, and Congress to garner support to end the soring of horses.
- Collaborate with the animal emergency management community (including government and non-governmental partners) to build and sustain animal emergency management capabilities nationally, and to communicate about effective disaster preparedness, response, and recovery for animals in disaster.

**➤Build strong partnerships and increased outreach and training to improve compliance and animal welfare.**

- Identify and develop relationships with stakeholders with whom AC does not routinely work.
- Partner with other organizations to educate the public and those interested in animal welfare issues about AC's important mission.
- Work with industry partners to develop and implement outreach and learning strategies to improve animal welfare and end the soring of horses.

- Foster relationships with the regulated community and animal emergency management partners to enhance planning, preparedness, and information-sharing.

## GOAL 2, OBJECTIVE A: PROMOTE ANIMAL WELFARE BY OPTIMIZING THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF ANIMALS.

### ➤ Use all the tools available to promote animal welfare: regulatory authorities, non-regulatory solutions, research and science, education and outreach, inspection, and enforcement.

- Revise licensing and permitting processes to (1) streamline the handling of applications, renewals, and annual reports, (2) establish criteria that promote compliance and build the integrity of the AC program.
- Explore emerging information and science related to space and behavior/environment enrichment needs for AWA-regulated animals and raise awareness among regulated entities of animals' species-specific social, environmental, and behavioral needs.
- Consider revisions to the handling regulations and guidance as they relate to dangerous animals to promote the humane handling of animals.
- Implement the *de minimis* licensing exemptions from the 2014 Farm Bill.
- Lift the stay on the contingency planning requirements.
- Complete and implement regulatory standards for birds.
- Implement the permitting process and coordinate administration for the importation of live dogs.
- Issue guidance and policies to improve the standards of care for bears.
- Issue guidance and policies aimed at reaching persons conducting unlicensed, regulated activities.
- Finalize revisions to the standards of care for marine mammals held in captivity.
- Focus regulatory resources and enforcement actions on situations where the health and well-being of animals are at greatest risk.
- Support research into improving animal welfare and expanding access to the latest information and advancements.
- Provide the public with learning opportunities to ensure everyone understands how to provide the best possible care for animals and the importance and benefits of doing so.
- Promote tools and best practices for emergency planning and preparedness for owners of animal-related businesses to build business and community resiliency.

### ➤ Ensure those who care for animals understand their responsibilities and animal welfare needs.

- Support attending veterinarians by launching an on-line education module for attending veterinarians to help them better understand their role and animal welfare responsibilities.

- Develop and prepare our inspectors to explain AWA regulatory requirements and expectations to attending veterinarians to create an environment for an open exchange of information on animal welfare.
- Develop information for licensees and registrants on establishing and following the program of veterinary care, and establish best practices and job aids for daily observation of animals.
- Support sharing of best practices in animal emergency management with key partners.

➤ Support emergency planning and preparedness that benefits animal welfare, and improve deployment readiness of AC personnel to capably meet emergency programs mission requirements, APHIS deployments, and FEMA mission assignments.

- Build and sustain a national strategy for animal emergency management that leverages the resources of the whole community to address emergency response and recovery needs.
- Support and participate in summits, planning meetings with partners, emergency management exercises, and workshops.
- Ensure and maintain an effective emergency management point-of-contact program.
- Develop the AC Incident Management Team (IMT) by completing and exercising the confiscation concept of operations and aligning the inspection guide to incorporate the use of the IMT.
- Maintain the scientific expertise to support radiological emergency management through the Advisory Team on Environment, Food, and Health.
- Ensure that AC personnel are properly trained and ready to support AC program emergencies, FEMA mission assignments, and APHIS deployments.

## GOAL 2, OBJECTIVE B: PROMOTE THE HUMANE CARE OF ANIMALS BY ELIMINATING THE CRUEL PRACTICE OF SORING IN HORSES.

➤ Enhance AC's ability to eliminate the soring of horses and restore fair competition.

- Finalize amendments to the HPA regulations to better position AC and the industry to eliminate soring.
- Continuously improve and optimize the processes and procedures used to detect soreness in horses to promote thorough, consistent examinations that ensure only sound horses participate in HPA-covered events.
- Implement joint learning opportunities for AC Veterinary Medical Officers (VMOs) and persons qualified to detect soreness in horses to ensure full alignment in inspection processes and procedures, and promote consistency of inspection results, regardless of who conducts the inspection.
- Pursue disqualification for persons who are qualified to detect soreness in horses and who fail to perform their duties in accordance with the HPA and regulations.
- Maximize inspection resources and pursue swift enforcement action to deter the inhumane practice of soring and create an environment that promotes fair competition.