

# **NCVMA POSITION STATEMENT**

## **ANIMAL WELFARE**

The NCVMA upholds the AVMA policy on animal welfare vs. animal rights. That policy is stated as follows, “Animal welfare is a human responsibility that encompasses all aspects of animal well being, including proper housing, management, nutrition, disease prevention and treatment, responsible care, humane handling, and, when necessary, humane euthanasia.”

Animal welfare and animal rights are not synonymous terms. Animal rights is a philosophical view and personal value characterized by an underpinning belief that animals should have positive legal rights and legal benefits and seeks to change their status or standing in the legal system for the protection or promotion of their interests. Classical animal welfare theory prescribes humane treatment and care of animals and the prevention of unnecessary suffering. All animals under our care are to be provided adequate food, water, shelter, medical attention, and freedom from unnecessary stress or pain. Owners and caretakers of all animals must be held accountable for assuring that these conditions are met. As veterinarians, it is our responsibility to promote and ensure the utmost standards of care for these different animal groups. It is our responsibility to enable animals to fulfill their destiny free from unnecessary pain, deprivation or artificially induced stress by enforcing humane treatment, appropriate husbandry, and scientific stewardship.

The NCVMA recognizes and supports the use of animals for food production, research, teaching, safety testing, exhibition, therapy, sporting and human companionship. However, the guiding principles of humane stewardship must prevail in all aspects of animal ownership. Standards of care for each category of animal population should be determined by experienced individuals who are trained and knowledgeable with the nature, behavior, needs, and idiosyncrasies of that particular group of animals. A detailed description of standards of care for animals used in research and teaching, animals used in entertainment, show and exhibitions, companion animals, horses, wildlife and captive exotic animals, and food animals such as cattle, sheep, swine and poultry can be found in the AVMA Policy Statements and Guidelines.

## **OWNERSHIP VS. GUARDIANSHIP OF ANIMALS**

The NCVMA upholds the role of animal ownership by humans rather than a relationship of guardianship. We believe in humane stewardship of animals and the existence of a hierarchy of animals in the food chain of nature. The term “animal guardianship” is defined as a person or institution who is legally responsible for the care of animals and as such can be manipulated by special interest groups and animal rights advocates to invoke legal barriers that may decrease the availability of veterinarians, owners, and caretakers to provide needed services and reasonable care, thereby ultimately resulting in unnecessary animal suffering and emerging threats to public health and safety. Taken to

extreme, guardianship statutes would undermine the protective care that owners can provide for their animals and the freedom of choice owners now are free to exercise, and could permit third parties to petition courts for custody of a pet, livestock, or animal for which they do not approve of the husbandry practices<sup>(1)</sup>. Furthermore, if guardianship is conferred, in the absence of a person or institution that is legally responsible, the state would assume all responsibilities for care.

<sup>(1)</sup> The Council of State Governments: Resolution on Animal Guardianship and Liability Legislation in CSG Policy (ed):2004