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Improved Nonhuman Animal Welfare Is Related More to Income Equality Than It Is to Income

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Abstract

The link between nonhuman animal welfare, income, and income inequality (Gini coefficient) was tested using consumption of animal products, laws protecting animals on the farm from the worst abuses, and animals used in experimentation as indicators. Experimentation on all animals and on rodents significantly increased in high-income European countries, although there was some evidence that the increase in experimentation on cats and dogs started to flatten out for the highest income countries. Consumption of all flesh products in high-income countries declined in more equal societies. More equal high-income countries also had stricter regulations protecting animals, although the same correlation was not seen between U.S. states. In New Zealand, there was some evidence that testing on cats and dogs declined during years when equality was improving. The results provide little evidence for a Kuznets effect of income on animal welfare, with the possible exception of companion animal treatment. They do, however, suggest that greater equality can be a predictor for better treatment of animals. Previous research has strongly suggested that social conditions for humans improve with greater equality. The same may be true for nonhuman animals. Alternatively, conditions conducive to improving human income equality may also lead to better animal welfare outcomes.

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Keywords

- animal welfare,
- Kuznets curve,
- inequality,
- Europe,
- United States,
- New Zealand

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