

Animal Tracker – Year 8

An HRC-Managed Research Study, April 2015



Report in Brief

This report summarizes results from Year 8 of the *Animal Tracker* annual survey of U.S. adults' attitudes toward animals. The first survey (Year 1, 2008) included 16 questions; a subset of five questions have been asked every year since. The most recent survey results from 2015 show that favorability toward the animal protection cause is strong and steady, the credibility of animal groups is robust, and ensuring the welfare of all animals is perceived by most people to be at least somewhat important. At the same time, discussion of animal issues remains moderate at best and there is some indication that people are increasingly likely to think that animal laws already offer "adequate" protection.

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HRC Information

The Humane Research Council is a nonprofit organization dedicated to maximizing the effectiveness of animal advocates by applying professional, efficient, and informative consumer and market research methods.

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Overview and Discussion

2015 RESULTS IN BRIEF

- ❖ There is a high level of support for the animal protection movement. More respondents (70%) rated their opinion of the animal protection cause as “favorable” than any other social movement listed in the survey, except worker’s rights.
- ❖ Most U.S. adults (57%) say they discussed or heard about animal protection (including animal rights and animal welfare) only “rarely” or “not at all” over the past three months. By comparison, 43% discussed or heard about it “frequently” or “occasionally.”
- ❖ Animal protection groups rank high in credibility for animal welfare information, below only veterinarians. The perceived credibility of animal groups is comparable to family/friends, farmers, and scientists, but greater than corporations and attorneys.
- ❖ More than three in four people (77% or more) believe that protecting animals in various situations is “very” or “somewhat” important. By comparison, 17% or less of respondents think that protecting these animals is “not very” or “not at all” important.
- ❖ U.S. adults are more likely to think laws are “adequate” for companion animals, endangered species, wildlife, and animals kept in shelters and zoos/aquariums. More people think that current laws are “inadequate” for horses/dogs used in racing, animals raised for food, animals in labs, and animals in circuses/rodeos.

SUMMARY RESULTS BY TOPIC (2015 ONLY)

- ❖ **Favorability (Q1) – What is your opinion of each of the following social causes or political movements?** Respondents gave feedback on a number of social and political causes. They were asked if their opinion of each was favorable, unfavorable, or if they had no opinion. Animal protection received the second-most favorable rating among all of the causes, with 70% of respondents indicating a “favorable” opinion and only 7% saying they found the animal protection movement “unfavorable.” Workers’ rights was the most favored cause, followed by animal protection and then tax reform/relief and environmentalism. Gay and lesbian rights and pro-life/anti-abortion causes received the least favorable ratings, with 27% and 31% indicating an “unfavorable” opinion of each, respectively.
- ❖ **Credibility (Q2) – How much credibility do you give each of the following sources when it comes to information about animal welfare?** Respondents were asked how much credibility they attribute to a variety of professions in relation to providing information about animal welfare. Veterinarians rank highest, with the vast majority of people (85%) thinking they have “significant” or “moderate” credibility. Family and friends are second (72%), followed by animal protection groups (69%), farmers and ranchers (68%), scientists and researchers (67%), and academics and scholars (57%). The least credible groups are attorneys and businesses/corporations; about two-thirds of respondents say these groups have “very little” or “no” credibility when it comes to providing information about animal welfare.

It is worth noting that animal protection groups have comparable credibility to farmers/ranchers and scientists/researchers. People seem to attribute credibility (at least in part) based on one's closeness to the animals, as well as their perceived intentions toward animals. The large difference in credibility between businesses/corporations on one hand, and farmers/ranchers (also for-profit operations) on the other, is of particular interest and may be worth exploring in further research. It may be useful to understand how farmers and ranchers are able to maintain their credibility despite the fact that their primary motivation is profit.

- ❖ **Awareness (Q7) – In the past three months, how often have you talked about or heard someone talking about animal protection, including animal rights and/or animal welfare?** This question is asked as a measure of public awareness and discussion. Although animal protection issues are on the radar of the U.S. public, they are not a regular topic of discussion. Given that most people have daily contact with animals or take action that impacts the lives of animals, the small proportion of U.S. adults that regularly discusses animal issues is noteworthy. One in eight U.S. adults (13%) say they talked or heard about animal issues “frequently” during the past three months, meaning daily or almost daily. Nearly a third (30%) say “occasionally” (weekly or monthly), about a third (32%) say “rarely” (once or twice), and a fourth of respondents (25%) say they did not discuss or hear about animal issues at all in the past three months.
- ❖ **Animal Welfare Importance by Situation (Q9) – How important to you is the welfare and protection of animals in each of the following situations?** The perceived importance of animal welfare is generally very high. More than three-fourths (77% or more) of U.S. adults said that the welfare and protection of animals is “very” or “somewhat” important for all of the situations listed – these cover companion animals, animals raised for food and racing, wildlife, and animals in shelters, laboratories, zoos, aquariums, circuses, and rodeos. In all cases, less than 5% of people surveyed said that animal welfare in these situations is “not at all important.” Importance varies slightly by type of animal and situation; predictably, animals used for personal consumption and economic benefit were generally attributed less importance.
- ❖ **Current Laws (Q13) – Do you think that laws protecting animals from inhumane treatment are adequate or inadequate for each of the following kinds of animals?** On average, more than a fourth (28%) of U.S. adults said they do not know if laws are adequate or inadequate for different types of animals. This is telling data and suggests a greater need for educating people on the inadequacy of current laws for many animals. Survey respondents are divided on which animals they think have adequate coverage under current laws and policies. They are much more likely to think that laws are adequate for companion animals, animals in zoos and aquariums, and wildlife on public lands, and somewhat more likely to think that laws are adequate for endangered species and animals in pounds or shelters.

Only two types of animals are clearly perceived by more people to have “inadequate” protection from current laws: animals in laboratories and animals used in circuses and rodeos. While animals raised for food and horses/dogs used in racing are also considered by more people to have inadequate coverage under current laws, the difference is marginal.

CHANGES FROM PREVIOUS YEARS

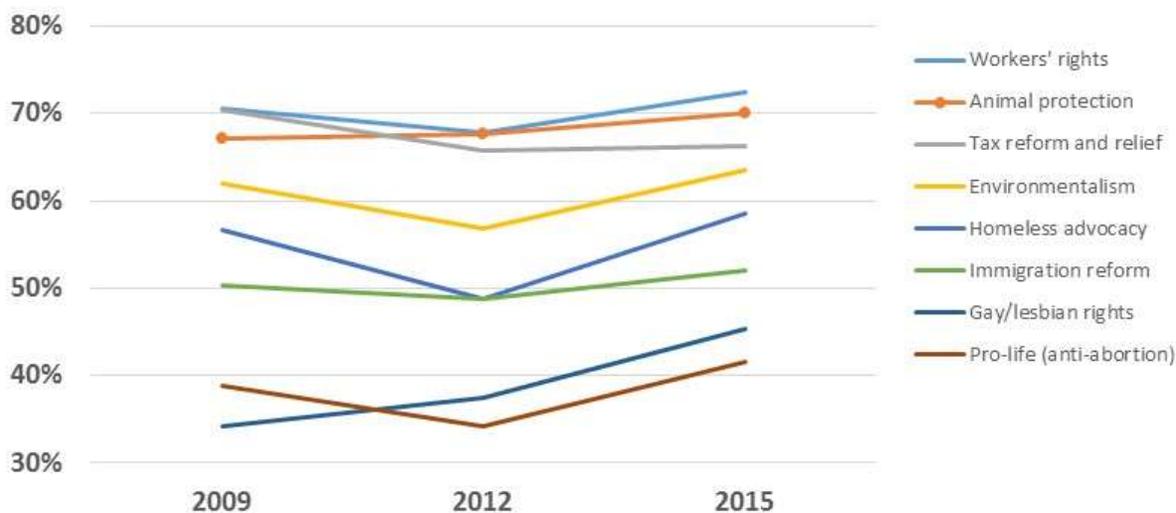
The 2015 survey results are generally consistent with the findings from previous years. The *Animal Tracker* questions are asked every three years and the same questions were also asked in 2009 and 2012, which provides some limited data to explore trends. Interestingly, 2012 appears to have been an “off” year, with respondents having less favorability toward most of the causes listed, discussing animal issues less often, etc. This could be attributable to sampling error or to a temporary shift in attitudes during the height of the U.S. economic recession.

The results from 2015 are therefore more consistent with the findings from 2009 than the results from 2012. The long-term trend is flat for most of the opinions covered in this year’s survey. However, there are some significant differences that stand out when comparing the latest results to previous years. The most important and pronounced of these changes are outlined below by subject area. For detailed differences between 2015 and 2009, please refer to the appendix.

❖ Favorability [Q1] – What is your opinion of each of the following social causes or political movements?

Most people have favorable attitudes toward animal protection as a cause, and that favorability has remained high since 2009. Although within the margin of error, favorable opinions of animal protection seem to have increased steadily over the years, while most other causes saw relatively large fluctuations in support. Specifically, favorability toward all causes dipped in 2012, with the exceptions of animal protection and gay/lesbian rights.

Favorability toward Animal Protection and Other Causes (% “Favorable”), 2009-2015

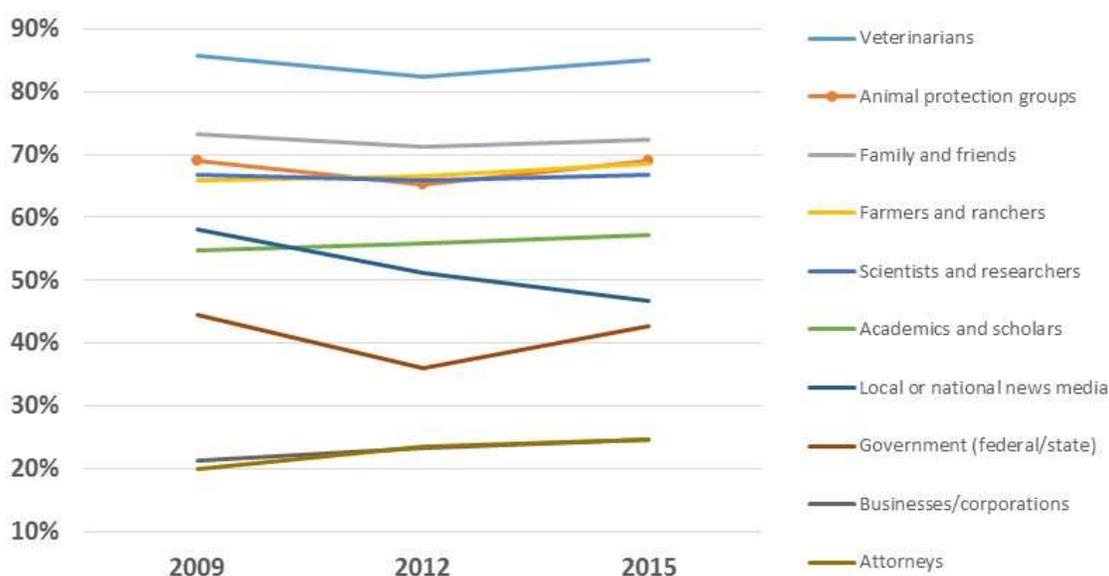


❖ **Credibility (Q2) – How much credibility do you give each of the following sources when it comes to information about animal welfare?**

Throughout all years of the *Animal Tracker*, veterinarians have consistently ranked as the most credible source of animal welfare information. Also consistent, animal protection groups have ranked second in credibility for all years of the survey. Both of these groups also had significant increases in perceived credibility from 2012 to 2015, while the credibility of most other sources was either flat or declined slightly. However, the longer-term trend (since 2009) shows no significant changes in the credibility for veterinarians or animal groups.

Although family/friends and farmers/ranchers have less perceived credibility than animal protection groups for all years, the differences are small. Scientists/researchers witnessed an increase in their perceived credibility in 2012 (against the overall trend), but that number returned to previous levels in 2015. Two sources of information – corporations and attorneys – have had consistently lower credibility throughout all years of the survey. Interestingly, the clearest long-term trend is a substantial decline in credibility for news media.

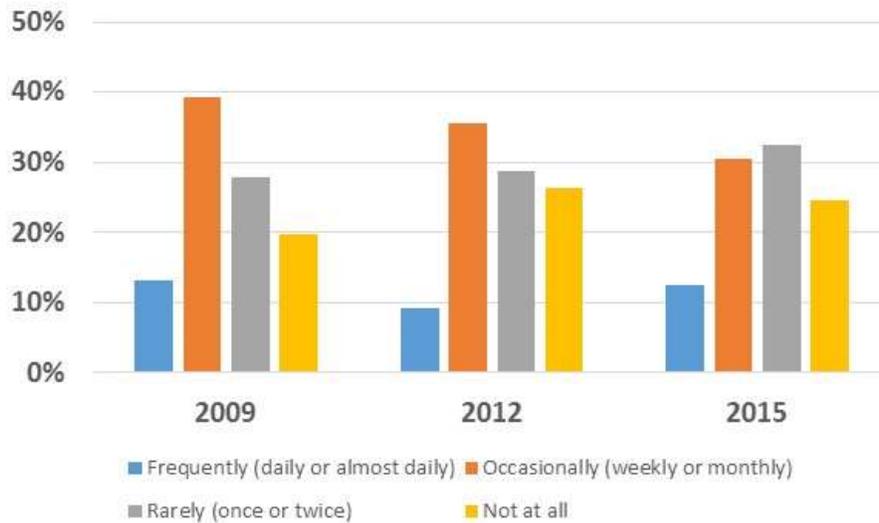
Perceived Credibility (“Significant/Moderate”), 2009-2015



❖ **Awareness [Q7] – In the past three months, how often have you talked about or heard someone talking about animal protection, including animal rights and/or animal welfare?**

Public discussion of animal issues has fluctuated substantially over the course of the *Animal Tracker*. In 2009 more than half of U.S. adults (52%) say they discussed animal protection, rights, or welfare “frequently” or “occasionally” during the past three months. In 2012 that figure had declined to 45%, and in 2015 the figure was 43%. However, from 2012 to 2015 there was a moderate increase in those who discuss animal issues “frequently” – increasing from 9% to 13%. Overall, the results from 2015 are consistent with 2012, and both years show less discussion of animal issues than in 2009. See the chart on the next page for details by year.

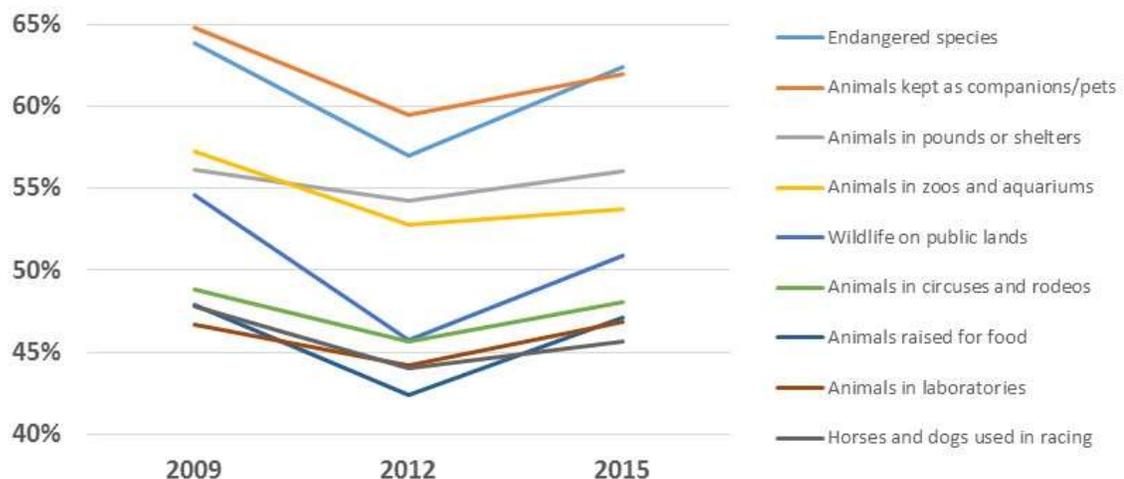
Discussion of Animal Protection Issues, 2009-2015



❖ **Animal Welfare Importance by Situation [Q9] – How important to you is the welfare and protection of animals in each of the following situations?**

The welfare and protection of animals has remained important (“very” or “somewhat”) for a majority of U.S. adults; this includes all animal types for all years of the survey. The proportion of survey respondents who said “very” important differs by animal type; this figure declined for all animal types in 2012, and rebounded slightly for all types in 2015. The largest increases from 2012 to 2015 were for endangered species, wildlife on public lands, and animals raised for food. Overall, however, since 2009 the perceived importance of animal protection has either held constant or declined slightly for all animal types in the survey.

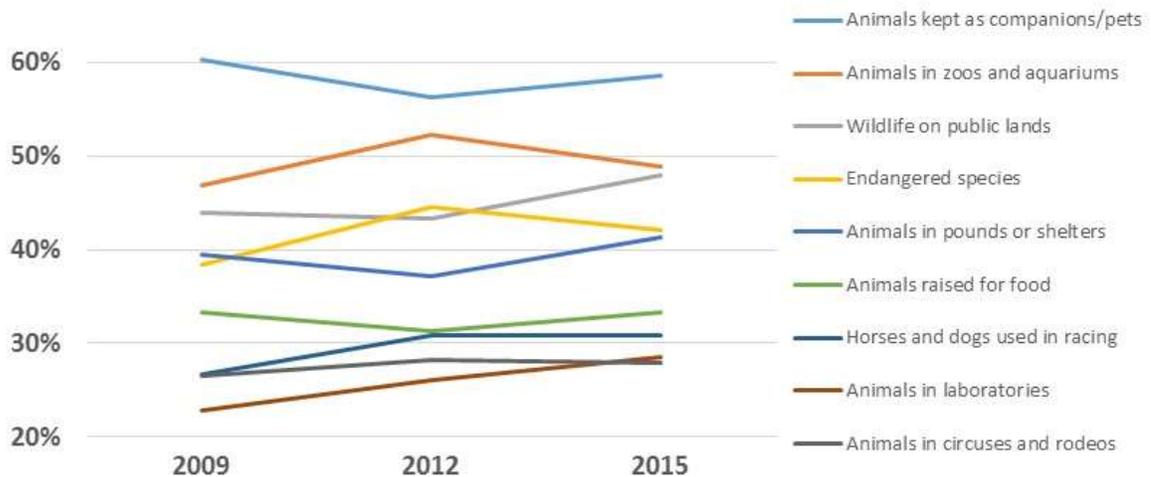
Perceived Importance by Animal Type (“Very Important”), 2009-2015



❖ **Current Laws [Q13] – Do you think that laws protecting animals from inhumane treatment are adequate or inadequate for each of the following kinds of animals?**

Regarding U.S. adults’ perceptions of current laws, there have been few clear trends from 2009 to 2015. Overall, since 2009, significantly more people think that laws are adequate for animals in laboratories, horses and dogs used in racing, wildlife on public lands, and endangered species. However, the increases were modest. Throughout all years and for most issues, the proportion who said they do not know if laws are adequate or not has remained high. Interestingly, however, over the long-term (2009 to 2015) there are significantly fewer people saying “do not know” for most of the animal types listed in the survey.

Perceived Adequacy of Laws (“Adequate”), 2009-2015



Key Implications for Animal Advocates

The *Animal Tracker* is a longitudinal study. The 2015 survey represents the study's eighth year and a third set of results for these specific survey questions. Now that we have collected three data points for each of these questions, we are able to identify preliminary trends to help advocates understand how public perceptions are changing over time. Please refer to the 2009 (Year 2) and 2012 (Year 5) reports for a more complete background and the detailed findings for each question. The following key implications are focused on the long-term trends from 2009 to 2015.

General Implications

It can be especially difficult to change hearts, minds, and behavior to help animals if people are not discussing animal issues on a regular basis. In general, public discussion of animal protection, rights, and welfare has remained mostly constant over the life of the *Animal Tracker*. From 2009 to 2015 there was a slight decrease in the amount animal issues are discussed. In 2015 a solid majority (57%) of U.S. adults say they discussed or heard about animal issues “rarely” or “not at all” over the past three months. It continues to be a challenge for advocates to ensure that animals are at the forefront of people’s minds. With discussion of animal issues taking place so infrequently, there is less chance of people taking positive action for animals.

Despite this, overall favorability toward animal protection as a cause remains very strong and has been consistently strong since the beginning of the study in 2009. Interestingly, while support for other issues has ebbed and flowed with political and economic cycles, favorability toward animal protection appears to persist relatively steadily. Additionally, animal protection groups have solid credibility; that they are second only to veterinarians is noteworthy.

Belief in the importance of animal welfare and protection is steadily high, with 75% (or more) of people saying it is “very” or “somewhat” important for all animal types during all years of the survey. At no point have more than 17% of U.S. adults said that maintaining animal welfare and protection is “not very” or “not at all” important for any animal type. On the other hand, these beliefs have not translated into widespread behavior change benefiting animals and there remains a disconnect between people’s thoughts and actions. This may be partly due to the fact that U.S. adults are increasingly likely to think that current laws are adequately safeguarding most animals, which may convey an (often false) sense of animal protection.

Implications by Issue Area

Companion Animals – Companion animals fulfill a unique role in the lives of many people. Whether they are in homes or shelters, nearly all U.S. adults believe that the welfare and protection of companion animals is important. However, most people also believe that current laws are already adequate for animals in homes, and a plurality believes laws are adequate for animals kept in pounds and shelters. An exception is the use of some companion animals for racing (i.e., horses and dogs) – a plurality of U.S. adults believes current laws protecting these animals are *inadequate*. However, people are also less likely to say the welfare of these animals is important to them.

Wildlife – Wild animals are revered by many U.S. adults who have strong feelings about the need to protect them. This is particularly true for endangered species, but also wild animals in zoos and aquariums as well as wildlife on public lands. The perceived importance of protecting wild animals is comparable to protecting companion animals. Similarly, however, people are more likely to say that current laws put in place to protect these animals are already “adequate.” There also appears to be a slight increase in that perception over time.

Animals Used for Food – When it comes to providing information about animal welfare, farmers and ranchers have credibility that is comparable (albeit slightly lower) to animal protection groups. This can be a challenge for advocates when presenting arguments to the public and the findings suggest that credible, third-party spokespeople may be helpful to counter the claims of animal farmers. Belief in the importance of protecting animals used for food is generally very strong, although the results are lower than for wildlife or companion animals. People are also more likely to believe that laws protecting farmed animals are inadequate, while nearly a third of U.S. adults say they do not know if the current laws are adequate.

Animals Used in Science – Hidden from public oversight, animals used in laboratories are among the least-protected animals in our society. While overall support for their welfare is still high, people are less likely to think that protecting animals used in science is important compared to many other types of animals. On the other hand, most people (a plurality of U.S. adults) believe that current laws safeguarding animals in laboratories are inadequate; a third say they do not know if these laws are adequate. Only about a fourth of people believe that current laws relating to animals used in science are adequate, which may suggest an opportunity to legislate changes to improve the protection of animals in laboratories.

Background and Methodology

STUDY BACKGROUND

The *Animal Tracker* is a collaborative research project that provides animal advocates with an accurate and consistent understanding of the opinions and behavior of U.S. adults over time. The initial *Animal Tracker* survey (Year 1) was completed in June 2008 and included a larger sample size (N=1,500) for the purpose of baseline analysis. Subsequent surveys have been completed annually since then, with each year asking a subset of questions from Year 1. Following are the sample sizes and error margins for all years of the *Animal Tracker*.

Year	Date	Number of Respondents	Margin of Error
8	March 2015	1,009	+/- 3.1%
7	March 2014	1,015	+/- 3.1%
6	March 2013	1,028	+/- 3.1%
5	March 2012	1,072	+/- 3.0%
4	March 2011	1,252	+/- 2.8%
3	March 2010	1,020	+/- 3.1%
2	March 2009	1,000	+/- 3.1%
1	March 2008	1,500	+/- 2.5%

All years of the survey have been fielded using the GfK/Knowledge Networks panel, which combines offline random digit dialing techniques with online panel research capabilities. This results in a true probability sample and survey data that are much more accurate than most other online surveys.

The Year 8 sample size is 1,009 respondents, although this number is slightly lower for most questions due to refusals; these were less than 2% in almost all cases. The possible answers were randomized for all survey questions except those that present answers in a logical order. Additionally, the results have been weighted to account for differences between survey respondents and the population being studied, in this case all non-institutionalized adults (ages ≥ 18) currently living in the U.S.

YEAR 8 VITAL SIGNS

- ❖ Field period: 3/27/2015-3/29/2015
- ❖ Total number of surveys fielded: 3,221
- ❖ Total number of surveys completed: 1,009
- ❖ Survey response rate: 31.3%
- ❖ Median completion time: 4.3 minutes

SURVEY LIMITATIONS

It should be noted that the use of online research methods can be subject to limitations given that some groups are not fully represented online; this typically results in under-representation of non-white, lower-income, and elderly individuals. Weighting the survey results reduces this bias considerably, but does not eliminate it entirely. This is in addition to the general nonresponse bias that results from a 31% response rate; it is possible that non-respondents have different opinions and behavior. Another caveat to these results is the reliance on self-reported data. Respondents' answers may differ from their actual opinions or behavior for a variety of reasons, particularly for questions involving predictions of the respondents' changes in the future. Additionally, interpretation of some terms (e.g., "often" and "sometimes") may vary from respondent to respondent.

Sponsorship Information

The *Animal Tracker* (Year 8) was generously sponsored by a consortium of animal advocacy organizations including (alphabetically) Alley Cat Allies, American Anti-Vivisection Society, Animal Legal Defense Fund, Animal Welfare Trust, The Humane Society of the United States, Maddie's Fund, the Pettus Crowe Foundation, and the Summerlee Foundation. The Humane Research Council initiated the collaborative study and provided supporting consulting services related to project planning, survey design, research, and analysis.

Year 9 of the *Animal Tracker* will be fielded in the first quarter of 2016 and will repeat the questions asked most recently in 2013. Year 9 will cover topics including knowledge of animal issues, importance of animal protection for certain consumer behaviors, the perceived impact of the animal cause, and support for (or opposition to) the animal protection movement's goals.

The cost of sponsorship for Year 9 is expected to be in the range of \$800 to \$1,000 per sponsor; the exact cost depends on the number of sponsors that participate. The benefits of sponsorship are substantial, including receiving access to more detailed survey results (including "cross-tab" data for all demographic segments) and having permission to use the survey results with the media, in publications, etc. New sponsors for Year 9 will be considered until January 31, 2016.

If you are interested in learning more about the recently completed Year 8 of the *Animal Tracker* or sponsoring the upcoming Year 9 survey, please contact Che Green at the Humane Research Council at (206) 905-9887 or info@humaneresearch.org.

To access reports and data from previous years of the *Animal Tracker*, as well as an interactive graphing tool to compare data for different years and demographic groups, please visit HRC's www.humanespot.org.

2015 Data (Topline Percentage Responses)

APPENDIX NOTES

- The question numbers below correspond to the numbering used during Year 1 (to make tracking easier between years of the survey). For the complete Year 1 results and to see all 16 original questions, please visit <http://www.humanespot.org/node/2901>.
- The numbers in parentheses show the percentage change from 2009 to 2015, and only if the difference is outside of the overall survey error margin of +/- 3.1%.
- Missing data (blanks/refusals) have been omitted from the analysis; however, blanks represent at most 2% of the response for any individual question or element.
- Where applicable, “don’t know” (DK), “not applicable” (NA), and “no opinion” responses have been combined.
- Responses are typically ranked by the first column of data. For some questions, however, it may make sense to sum columns for a more accurate impression of public opinion.
- Note: Row totals may not equal 100% and percent change may not equal zero for all questions due to rounding.

[Q1] What is your opinion of each of the following social causes or political movements?

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No Opinion	Do Not Know
Workers' rights	72%	7%	16%	5%
Animal protection	70	7 (-3)	20	3
Tax reform and relief	66 (-4)	9	17 (+4)	8
Environmentalism	63	12	19	5
Homeless advocacy	58	11	24	7
Immigration reform	52	23 (+6)	18 (-5)	7
Gay/lesbian rights	45 (+11)	27 (-5)	24 (-4)	4
Pro-life (anti-abortion)	42	31	22	5

[Q2] How much credibility do you give to each of the following sources when it comes to information about animal welfare?

	Significant	Moderate	Very Little	None	Do Not Know
Veterinarians	57%	29%	6%	3%	6%
Animal protection groups	34	35	19	5	6
Family and friends	29	43	16	4	8
Farmers and ranchers	27	42	18	5	8
Scientists and researchers	25	42	19	6	8
Academics and scholars	16	42 (+4)	23	8	11
Local or national news media	8 (-5)	39 (-6)	34 (+6)	11 (+4)	8
Government (federal or state)	6	36	33	16 (+5)	8
Businesses and corporations	4	21 (+3)	46	21	9 (-4)
Attorneys	3	21 (+5)	40	26	10 (-4)

[Q7] In the past three months, how often have you talked about or heard someone talking about animal protection, including animal rights and/or animal welfare?

Frequently (i.e. daily or almost daily)	13%
Occasionally (i.e., weekly or monthly)	30 (-9)
Rarely (i.e., once or twice)	32 (+4)
Not at all	25 (+5)

[Q9] How important to you is the welfare and protection of animals in each of the following situations?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not at All Important	Do Not Know
Endangered species	62%	25%	6%	2%	5%
Animals kept as companions or pets	62	25	7	2	4
Animals in pounds or shelters	56	29 (-4)	7	3	4
Animals in zoos and aquariums	54 (-3)	32	7	2	5
Wildlife on public lands	51 (-4)	34	8	3	5
Animals in circuses and rodeos	48	32 (-4)	12 (+3)	3	5
Animals raised for food	47	33	10	4	5
Animals in laboratories	47	32	12	3	6
Horses and dogs used in racing	46	31	13	4	6

[Q13] Do you think that laws protecting animals from inhumane treatment are adequate or inadequate for each of the following kinds of animals?

	Adequate	Not Adequate	Do Not Know
Animals kept as companions or pets	59%	20%	22%
Animals in zoos and aquariums	49	26	25 (-5)
Wildlife on public lands	48 (+4)	25	27 (-4)
Endangered species	42 (+4)	31 (-4)	27
Animals in pounds or shelters	41	33	26
Animals raised for food	33	38	29
Horses and dogs used in racing	31 (+4)	35	34 (-4)
Animals in laboratories	28 (+6)	39	33 (-6)
Animals in circuses and rodeos	28	41	31 (-4)