

Delineating the Differences in Veterinary Treatment between Domestic Companion Pets and Production Animals in the United States: Implications for Policy

DeKarra Johnson

Mentor: McNair Staff

Abstract

People's attitudes toward animals impact the quality of veterinary treatment provided for domestic companion animals and production animals. The value of certain animal species in society is dependent on how humans can relate to and benefit from animals. In the United States, some domestic animals such as dogs and cats are held in high-esteem and are given near-human status. On the other hand, domestic animals like cattle and swine, which are primarily used as food sources, are given the status of inanimate objects to be treated as property. As a result, the allocation of resources, including capital and labor, is not proportionally distributed between companion animal medicine and production animal medicine. There are negative consequences of this uneven distribution that threaten the security of the United States' food supply and human health. The spread of foodborne illnesses and antibiotic-resistant pathogens can be linked to weak food safety and antibiotic regulations for production animals. Such weaknesses enable diseased animals to enter the food supply contaminating millions of pounds of animal byproducts consumed by companion animals and humans. By understanding what factors influence people to continue providing inferior veterinary treatment to the production animals they depend on for subsistence, scholars and practitioners in the field of animal husbandry can create new and effective strategies that encourage sympathy toward production animal wellness for the sake of human wellness. Building upon a completed review of the literature, research addressing the aforementioned issues will be developed and implemented to satisfy requirements in the McNair Scholars Program.
