

# Preserving animal health and welfare

**T**HE health and welfare of humans and animals are intertwined in many ways. Pets offer us companionship, livestock help to provide sustenance and biodiversity protects entire ecosystems.

Quite simply, we need them, and we need to know how to care for them properly — even livestock destined for the slaughterhouse deserves to exist with as little suffering as possible. That's where bioveterinary science comes in.

While well established in many parts of the world, it is relatively new as a field of study in Malaysia. It combines medical knowledge such as anatomy, physiology, microbiology, and pathology with animal care and management.

*IMU University school of veterinary medicine dean Professor Dr Malaika Watanabe says that when you work to ensure animal health, you are also supporting environmental health and, by extension, human health. PICTURE CREDIT: IMU UNIVERSITY*



At its core, bioveterinary science supports the ethical and responsible treatment of animals.

This also serves to protect public health by maintaining levels of hygiene and other standards that reduce environmental contamination and help prevent zoonotic diseases that can infect humans, explains IMU University school of veterinary medicine dean Professor Dr Malaika Watanabe.

Much of the world continues to rely heavily on animals and animal-based products. Global meat production has more than tripled over the past 50 years.

Meanwhile, the emotional connection humans share with companion animals has contributed to a booming pet industry, which was valued at over US\$246 billion worldwide in 2023 and



*Livestock management that prioritises animal health reduces the risk of disease and culling. PICTURE CREDIT: SENIVPETRO — FREEPIK*

projected to surpass US\$427 billion by 2032.

This growth is reflected locally as well. More than 50% of Malaysians own pets, contributing to a 25% increase in the pet care sector in 2022.

This includes services, pet sales, and veterinary care.

"When you work to ensure animal health, you are also supporting environmental and, by extension, human health," says Dr Malaika.

Owners have the responsibility to deworm their dogs and cats - this is because infected animals can shed parasitic eggs in the environment. This can put humans at risk, especially children in playgrounds, who could get infected and become seriously ill.

Being a responsible pet owner is also part of being responsible for public health — it all comes full circle.

Meanwhile, livestock management that prioritises animal health

reduces the risk of disease and culling.

Managing livestock efficiently and ethically is essential for food security, which is critical in many countries, so it is important to make it as sustainable as possible.

Keeping animals healthy also helps prevent unnecessary or indiscriminate use of antibiotics, which can have repercussions on humans.