

## FAWC publishes Opinion on the welfare of UK dairy cows

Dairy cow welfare has received increasing coverage and the most recent report to be published in this area is an 'Opinion on the welfare of the dairy cow' by the UK's Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC). FAWC periodically issues Opinions with the aim of advising government bodies within the United Kingdom on subjects that they believe to be of particular importance to farm animal welfare.

The FAWC last considered dairy cow welfare in 1997 when it published a report in which 191 recommendations were made on a wide range of aspects, including: stockmanship, building design, calving aids, mutilations, unwanted progeny, zero-grazing, rearing heifers and calves, nutrition and cow health. The recent opinion is much more specific in its focus and FAWC identifies six areas of critical importance:

- The supply of trained, skilled dairy farmers and stockmen;
- The incidence, prevalence and causes of lameness, mastitis, metabolic diseases and injuries in dairy cows;
- The level of infertility in both heifers and cows, though this is not itself a direct measure of welfare;
- The lack of centralised recording schemes yielding data at the national level;
- Breeding policies for dairy cattle; and
- Public surveillance of welfare.

The FAWC Opinion is sympathetic to the difficulties faced by the dairy industry over the past ten years (input costs have risen and milk prices have decreased, often below the cost of production) and they remark that these difficulties have, in turn, resulted in less investment in areas such as education, recruitment and training, and farm infrastructure; all of which can have effects on dairy cow welfare. The FAWC also recognises the efforts made by the industry to improve dairy cow welfare following their 1997 report, including the introduction of breeding initiatives that consider health and welfare and reducing many traditional causes of lameness, eg sole ulcers. However, the general feeling of the Opinion is that more needs to be done to improve the welfare of dairy cows and areas that were of concern ten years ago are still of concern today: overall prevalence of lameness and mastitis have remained unchanged or have increased, and conception rates have been decreasing year-on-year and now stand at only 40%. Additionally, the FAWC note that there is a problem with the recruitment and retention of dairy staff in the UK and that there are currently a number of barriers to training initiatives in the industry, including a low perceived value and lack of awareness of the benefits of training. The UK is also one of the few countries within the European Union that does not have a centralised national database for recording dairy cow health and welfare, which the FAWC believe compromises the ability of the UK dairy industry to make national improvements in welfare.

In conclusion, the FAWC consider that "the evidence is that the welfare of dairy cows has not improved significantly

over the last decade" and five recommendations are made to ensure that today's dairy cow has "a life worth living".

**FAWC Opinion on the Welfare of the Dairy Cow** (October 2009). Farm Animal Welfare Council. A4, 14 pp Available for download from the FAWC website: <http://www.fawc.org.uk/reports.htm> or by contacting the FAWC Secretariat, Area 5A, 9 Millbank, c/o Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR

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## Welfare Quality® publishes pig, poultry and cattle assessment protocols

2004 saw the official start of 'Welfare Quality®', a project described as the largest piece of integrated research to be carried out on animal welfare within Europe. The project, supported by the European Commission under the Sixth Framework Programme: Food Quality and Safety, has been co-ordinated by Professor Harry Blokhuis of Wageningen University and Research Centre, and involved over 40 partner institutes and universities. The primary aim of Welfare Quality® has been to develop a scientifically-based method for assessing and improving farm animal welfare across Europe through integrating animal welfare into the food quality chain. Four main areas of research were identified as key issues for investigation at the start of the project:

- Consumers, retailers and producers concerns and requirements for animal welfare and welfare-friendly products;
- To develop a robust on-farm welfare monitoring and information systems for selected farm animal species;
- To define integrated, knowledge-based, practicable species-specific strategies to improve farm animal welfare; and
- To implement a welfare monitoring and information system and welfare improvement strategies developed.

In October 2009, the final stakeholder conference: 'Delivering Animal Welfare and Quality: Transparency in the Food Production Chain', was held in Uppsala, Sweden. The conference was used to summarise the progress made during the five-year project and also to launch the Welfare Quality® assessment protocols for pigs, poultry and cattle. Pigs, poultry and cattle had been selected as the three species to focus on when developing a standardised assessment method due to their economic and numeric importance.

These assessment protocols each follow the same format and contain: a background of the Welfare Quality® project; guidelines describing the type and method of data to be collected when assessing an animal unit (defined as a section of a farm, a transport unit or a slaughter plant that deals with a certain type of animal); scoring sheets and how to calculate scores once measurements have been taken; and general guidelines for use when visiting an animal unit.

Each protocol is based around four welfare principles considered to be key to high standards of animal welfare: good feeding, good housing, good health and appropriate behaviour. A total score is calculated for each principle by considering

twelve welfare criteria (between two and four for each principle) which, in turn, are scored for a range of welfare measures (between 30 and 50 measurements for each species).

The majority of welfare measures are animal-based, which is a key feature of the Welfare Quality® assessment method. Animal-based measures involve taking measurements directly from the animals themselves, such as behavioural or clinical observations, as opposed to the more traditionally-used resource or management-based measures, eg how much space does an animal have or what is the farm protocol for managing animals in a certain situation? For example, the welfare principle ‘good housing’ has three welfare criteria: comfort around resting, thermal comfort, and ease of movement. To assess these criteria in sows and piglets, the following animal-based measures are taken: bursitis and shoulder scores (sows); absence of manure on the body (sows and piglets); and panting and huddling (sows and piglets). Additionally, two resource measurements are taken: space allowance and assessment of farrowing crates. Each of these measures is described and a method of scoring given to create a criterion-score.

Once scores have been obtained for each criterion then these are, in turn, synthesised to give an overall score for the welfare principle. The four principles are then integrated to give the farm unit an overall classification into one of four categories: excellent, enhanced, acceptable, and unclassified.

Although the scoring system as a whole appears to be quite complicated on first viewing (and there has been a great deal of debate regarding the weighting and synthesising of various scores), the actual — on the ground — assessment has been deliberately kept as simple as possible and many measurements are scored using a straightforward binary or three-point scale. Additionally, the use of value judgements has been minimised where possible and veterinary expertise or specialist behavioural knowledge is not required to undertake the process. However, training is considered essential and Welfare Quality® state that “...no individual or organisation can be considered capable of applying these methods in a robust, repeatable and valid way without attending harmonised training approved by the Welfare Quality® consortium”.

It is hoped that the data gathered using the Welfare Quality® assessment protocols will provide pertinent information to farmers and unit managers regarding the welfare status of their farms compared to those of their peers and will enable them to monitor changes in welfare over time and assist with decisions when implementing welfare improvement strategies. It is also intended that the data will, in the future, help to inform consumers and retailers of the welfare status of the producers from whom they purchase products.

Although the Welfare Quality® project has reached the end of its five-year timeline, it is hoped that the connections between individuals and organisations made during the project will remain strong and that work will continue. The assessment protocols are regarded as ‘living documents’ to be updated and revised as new scientific knowledge comes to light.

**Welfare Quality® Assessment Protocol for Cattle** (October 2009). Welfare Quality® Consortium, Lelystad, Netherlands. A4, 182 pp ISBN: 978-90-78240-04-4. Price £5. Available at: <http://www.welfarequality.net> or from [info@welfarequality.net](mailto:info@welfarequality.net)

**Welfare Quality® Assessment Protocol for Pigs (Sows, Piglets, Growing and Finishing Pigs)** (October 2009). Welfare Quality® Consortium, Lelystad, Netherlands. A4, 122 pp ISBN: 978-90-78240-05-1. Price £5. Available at: <http://www.welfarequality.net> or from [info@welfarequality.net](mailto:info@welfarequality.net)

**Welfare Quality® Assessment Protocol for Poultry (Broilers, Laying hens)** (October 2009). Welfare Quality® Consortium, Lelystad, Netherlands. A4, 114 pp ISBN: 978-90-78240-06-8. Price £5. Available at: <http://www.welfarequality.net> or from [info@welfarequality.net](mailto:info@welfarequality.net)

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### **Revision process to update EU legislation protecting the welfare of laboratory animals continues**

For more than twenty years, Council Directive 86/609/EEC has acted as the foundation for national legislation to regulate the use of animals in experimental and scientific procedures across the European Union (in the United Kingdom this Directive is enacted through the Animals [Scientific Procedures] Act 1986). Included within the Directive are minimum standards for the acquisition and care of vertebrate animals used in experiments and training of staff who handle animals or supervise scientific procedures.

Council Directive 86/609/EEC originally came into force to avoid disruption in trade between countries of the European Community as legislation to protect laboratory animal welfare varied between individual countries. Consequently, Council Directive 86/609/EEC emerged in November 1986 to ensure that protective animal welfare measures were “approximated so as to avoid affecting the establishment and functioning of the common market, in particular by distortions of competition or barriers to trade”.

In 2001, the European Commission noted that, since its adoption, the Directive had become increasingly outdated due to advances in animal welfare science and the evolution of new scientific procedures and technologies, such as cloning, transgenics and xenotransplantation. Additionally, the expansion of the European Union had presented a number of challenges regarding the implementation of regulations across member states. Other problems included: difficulties in collating and interpreting data, such as the exact number of animals used and the severity of experiments undertaken; limitations in the scope of the Directive with some animals currently excluded, eg animals used in educational training within institutions; and a lack of standardised training for individuals working with laboratory animals.

In November 2008, the European Commission published the first draft revision of the Directive. This included a number of measures that aimed to strengthen the existing legislation, significantly improve the welfare of animals used in safety testing and biomedical research, promote