

Book Reviews

On-farm Monitoring of Pig Welfare

Edited by A Velarde and R Geers (2007). Published by Wageningen Academic Publishers, PO Box 200, NL-6700 AE Wageningen, The Netherlands. 203 pp Paperback (ISBN 978-90-8686-025-8). €49, US\$65.

This book has arisen as a deliverable from the COST Action 846 working group “measuring and monitoring farm animal welfare”. COST (Co-operation in Science and Technology) is a European Intergovernmental network which simply aims to bring together scientists from Europe and beyond. This was certainly achieved in the case of the ‘Pig’ sub-working group judging by the range of active and respected researchers who have contributed.

The book aims to outline methods of monitoring the welfare of pigs, on-farm. A range of welfare issues are addressed from lying behaviour, fear of humans and stereotypies through to those relating to specific physical problems such as vulva biting, cannibalism and lameness. Physical indicators such as skin lesions, bursitis, body condition and cleanliness are also included along with some chapters which address methods of assessing environment provisions such as space allowance, bedding provision, floor type and recreational devices. Each parameter is afforded a single chapter containing a summary of potential methods of measurement along with a discussion of their validity, reliability and feasibility. Finally, every chapter is rounded off with some summary recommendations from its author about how and indeed whether the parameter should be measured and in what circumstances. The chapters all follow a clearly laid out, standard format which makes the book straightforward for a reader to navigate through.

The book takes a no-nonsense approach to putting forward a range of measures. It overcomes the now almost obligatory angst of animal welfare researchers about what really is welfare, what matters most to the animal and who should be carrying out these measurements through the simple expedient of not discussing them. In one sense this gives the text a brisk and business-like feel but possibly leaves the reader wondering a little about how the selected parameters were arrived at and what should be done with them now. This straightforward approach has, in places, resulted in some rather brusque treatment of important considerations. For example, in the chapter concerning surgical interventions, ably written by Valerie Courboulay, the possibility of long (or even short) term pain associated with tail docking is downplayed to the point of insignificance. This contrasts with an earlier chapter by Marc Bracke who highlighted the fact that tail-stumps amputated through biting episodes have been found to develop neuromas which may be associated with tail-stump sensitivity or even phantom ‘tail’ pains. The final chapter offers some guidelines for the use of these welfare measures in the development of a monitoring tool for on-farm welfare. The authors point out straight away that the selection of parameters for inclusion in an assessment

system depends upon its ultimate application and what resources are available to its user ie a pen and paper or equipment for ultrasonic backfat depth measurement. Following this rather humble acknowledgement is a table presenting a summary of the parameters discussed, their strengths and weaknesses and the COST groups’ decision about their suitability for inclusion as a monitoring tool.

The writing in places is dense and rather dry, demanding considerable concentration from the reader. In addition, its attempt to cover all aspects of pig production sometimes leads to confusion about which measures are applicable to which class of pig. As this is, however, a general reference text it is up to the reader to decide on the ultimate applicability of the measures. The index of welfare problems to be measured appears comprehensive in terms of problems experienced by pigs in modern production although as welfare science increasingly embraces the debate about indicators of positive welfare it would have been nice to see this included, possibly through a greater scope for the qualitative assessment work of Françoise Wemelsfelder.

So, in summary, I found this book to take a business-like and pragmatic approach to listing, describing, in places usefully illustrating and evaluating a series of animal-, environment- and management-based welfare measures. It is an excellent resource which I am delighted to have on my bookshelf and would enthusiastically recommend to animal welfare scientists and students with an interest in monitoring pig welfare. However, experience also provokes me to caution that generating a welfare assessment system which finds the balance between being comprehensive and feasible is often as much of a challenge as identifying the individual measures themselves. Added to this is the responsibility we all have to ensure that our on-farm welfare assessment systems are linked to mechanisms for achieving welfare improvement.

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Ethical Eye: Animal Welfare

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“The Council of Europe was the first intergovernmental organisation to express concern about the fate of animals used by man. The general public in all Council of Europe member states is genuinely concerned about unnecessary suffering on the part of animals, and pressure is being brought to bear on governments to remedy this situation.”

So writes Egbert Ausems, former Head of Animal Welfare of the Council of Europe’s Directorate of Legal Affairs, and one of 23 distinguished European authors contributing to this latest book in the Council’s *Ethical Eye* series.

The series, which includes titles on subjects such as Euthanasia and Drug addiction, aims to “outline the ethical issues relating