

Principles and criteria of good Animal Welfare



Consumers are unclear about what different assurance schemes and labels actually say about the quality of the animals' lives. Therefore, there is a clear need for the harmonised, comprehensive and reliable welfare assessment and product information systems that Welfare Quality[®] is developing. It is now widely accepted that animal welfare is very complex, that it can be affected by many factors, and that it embraces both physical and mental health. In a critical first step, we have drawn together the views of consumers, industry, farmers, legislators and scientists to establish four principles which are essential to safeguard and improve farm animal welfare: good housing, good feeding, good health and appropriate behaviour. These complement and extend the so-called Five Freedoms and provide the solid platform needed to build the Welfare Quality[®] assessment system. Within these four principles we defined twelve clear criteria (see below).

Introduction

European citizens regard the welfare status of farm animals as an important aspect of overall food quality. Welfare Quality[®] is an EU funded project designed to integrate farm animal welfare into the food chain by addressing such societal expectations and market demands, and developing reliable on-farm welfare assessment systems. Animal welfare can be a difficult concept to pin down, and many people have their own personal views. Despite this there is general agreement within the scientific community about what represents good animal welfare. This consensus was elegantly expressed in the 'Five Freedoms' (Farm Animal Welfare Council, 1992). A balanced welfare assessment system has to satisfy public, industry, political and scientific concerns before it can be widely accepted. After extensive discussion with consumers, representatives of key

stakeholder groups, policy makers and scientists, Welfare Quality[®] defined four animal welfare principles: **Good housing, good feeding, good health and appropriate behaviour**. Within these principles we highlighted twelve distinct but complementary animal welfare criteria. These underpin the welfare assessment systems that are being developed for cattle, pigs and poultry in Welfare Quality[®].



Unni Kjærnes

The principles of farm animal welfare were developed by two Subprojects. The first Subproject investigates societal attitudes and practices among consumers, farmers and retailers, as they impact upon animal welfare. It assesses to what extent new welfare strategies might be achievable in practice. Subproject leader is Unni Kjærnes, Unni.Kjarnes@sifo.no



Prof. Linda Keeling

The second Sub-project aims to contribute towards developing an integrated, standardised methodology for the assessment of animal welfare in cattle, pigs and poultry from farm to slaughter. This methodology is founded upon animal-based,

resource-based and management-based measures. It also has to satisfy public, industry and political views of animal welfare. Subproject leader is Prof. Linda Keeling, Linda.keeling@hmh.sl.se



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Criteria that underpin the Welfare Quality® assessment systems

1. Animals should not suffer from prolonged hunger, i.e. they should have a sufficient and appropriate diet.
2. Animals should not suffer from prolonged thirst, i.e. they should have a sufficient and accessible water supply.
3. Animals should have comfort around resting.
4. Animals should have thermal comfort, i.e. they should neither be too hot nor too cold.
5. Animals should have enough space to be able to move around freely.
6. Animals should be free of physical injuries.
7. Animals should be free of disease, i.e. farmers should maintain high standards of hygiene and care.
8. Animals should not suffer pain induced by inappropriate management, handling, slaughter, or surgical procedures (e.g. castration, dehorning).
9. Animals should be able to express normal, non-harmful, social behaviours, e.g. grooming.
10. Animals should be able to express other normal behaviours, i.e. it should be possible to express species-specific natural behaviours such as foraging.
11. Animals should be handled well in all

situations, i.e. handlers should promote good human-animal relationships.

12. Negative emotions such as fear, distress, frustration or apathy should be avoided whereas positive emotions such as security or contentment should be promoted.

Emphasis on animal-based measures

The welfare of an animal depends on how it experiences the situation in which it lives. The Welfare Quality® assessment scheme emphasises the animal's point of view by placing increased importance on measures taken on animals (e.g. bodily condition, injuries, fear) in its assessment of the degree of fulfilment of the twelve welfare criteria outlined above. By doing so, the assessment system is rather independent of the rearing systems. However, relevant resource-based (e.g. space, temperature) and management-based (e.g. handling, record keeping) measures will also be included. Collectively, these measures will help to reliably assess the animals' welfare status, to identify causes of poor welfare and to formulate advice for farmers on possible improvements.

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Welfare Quality® is a European research project focusing on the integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain. The project aims to accommodate societal concerns and market demands, to develop reliable on-farm monitoring systems, product information systems, and practical species-specific strategies to improve farm animal welfare. Forty-four institutes and universities, representing thirteen European countries and four Latin American countries, participate in this integrated research project.

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