



Electronic newsletter of the Welfare Quality
Project FOOD-CT-2004-506508



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Agenda

July 9-13th
Presentations of
Welfare Quality®
at the ADSA

Welfare Quality surfing on high waves



Atalya, Turkey

April 2007
(to be confirmed)
Welfare Quality
conference for
stakeholders !

Welfare Quality® will continue to be implemented long beyond the end of the project.

Recently, the European Commission adopted the Action Plan on the protection and welfare of animals (see below). This plan clearly supports Welfare Quality's approach of developing standardised welfare indicators and other initiatives to link animal production practices with effective marketing and thereby provides clear information to guide consumer choice.

We plan another Welfare Quality® conference for stakeholders in 2007. This will provide us with an excellent opportunity to report our results and discuss them with a wide range of influential stakeholders and the media. The sense of team spirit has really developed strongly within Welfare Quality®. I feel privileged to work with such a team of excellent scientists who are all committed to achieving results that I believe will have a great impact on farm animal welfare and sustainable agriculture in Europe.

How pig farmers engage with animal welfare



A case study was designed for studying pig farmers' attitudes to animal welfare, their judgement of animal welfare regulations and readiness to implement more stringent measures, and their expectation regarding the marketability of animal-friendly products. Most farmers consider participation in basic quality assurance schemes as necessary and more or less mandatory in order to sell their products. Top quality assurance schemes are considered as important for securing access to markets but also as instruments for product distinction. Participation in specific animal welfare and organic schemes means choosing a different way of production and often a different market. For many farmers ethical considerations play an important role in that choice. Generally speaking, farmers in

specific animal welfare and organic schemes are more open to implementing additional animal welfare measures than are farmers in basic and top quality assurance schemes. In part, this is related to their different definition of animal welfare. Some of the new measures do not attune to the definition of farmers in basic and top quality assurance schemes. Alongside differences across schemes, national contexts can add to the explanation of differences between farmers. This context varies from almost absence of schemes in Norway and Sweden, as animal welfare is already strictly regulated by law, to the prominence of schemes in the market-led economies of the Netherlands, the UK and France, to an almost absence of schemes in Italy due to lack of animal welfare concerns. [More](#)



Do quality assurance labels support welfare claims?

Social scientists have carried out a study of the schemes whose labels were found on products with animal welfare claims. These labels are the main form of communication between quality assurance schemes and shoppers. The relationship between assurance schemes and consumers in Europe is complicated as some

For the majority of schemes with labels carrying animal welfare claims, animal welfare is secondary to a more general concern for communicating 'quality'. However, there are exceptions, such as the RSPCA Freedom Food Scheme in the UK, which is the only dedicated quality assurance for animal welfare in Europe;

retailers and manufacturers choose not to use logos on own-brand packaging or, where they are used, they are part of a carefully organised marketing strategy of separating category lines by quality. This does not give a clear picture to consumers as to what welfare standards products have been produced. Our study investigated the importance of animal welfare in assurance schemes.

Swedish Meats implicitly guarantees higher animal welfare standards, because shoppers know that Swedish meat is produced to higher standards compared to meat from other countries; Peter's Farm in the Netherlands and Thierry Schweitzer in France have created their own dedicated welfare-friendlier production systems and labels. [More](#)

Monitoring and assessing animal welfare



An important target is to develop a monitoring system by which everybody can see that their personal concerns about the way animals are kept, managed and handled are addressed in a serious way. We are planning to start the first testing of the full system in January 2007. There are areas of concern for which we do not have appropriate measurements at present, but scientists are constantly developing new methodologies (we have, for example, few good measurements for positive emotions), which over time might become included in new versions of the monitoring system. It might also be that new findings prove that what we thought was an area of concern is less of a problem for the animals than we thought, or that a new aspect of the animal's environment is cause for concern (e.g. not providing daylight). Therefore, we have designed methodologies for checking the reliability of measures; we identified potential measures for the various animal categories; we started to evaluate research proposals to carry out the work on the measures; we validated the measures and tested these for repeatability and

feasibility under commercial conditions. Further, we researched how to integrate all these different measures into an overall welfare assessment. This included identifying both current techniques and problems when pooling information on animal welfare, and constructing the integration process. It is planned to group the many different measures into 12 mutually exclusive welfare criteria. The different criteria will then be grouped to give overall scores for four principle questions: Are the animals properly fed and supplied with water? Are the animals properly housed? Are the animals healthy? Does the behaviour of the animals reflect an optimised emotional state? When the answers to these questions are combined, we will have an assessment of welfare on a scale from good to bad that can be easily communicated to consumers. Not only will the monitoring scheme give a measure of welfare to consumers and retailers, but farmers and slaughterhouses will be able to use the results of the individual measures to identify strengths and weakness in their housing and management. [More](#)



Action plan protection and welfare animals

Recently, the European Commission adopted a new Action Plan on the protection and welfare of animals. It outlines concrete measures to improve the protection and welfare of animals over the next five years. For the period 2006–2010, five main areas of action have been set out to meet this objective: upgrading minimum standards for animal welfare; promoting research and alternative approaches to animal testing; introducing standardised animal welfare indicators; better informing animal handlers and the general public on animal welfare issues; and supporting international

initiatives for the protection of animals.

The Action Plan, which was called for by the European Parliament and the Council, aims to clarify existing EU legislation on animal welfare while suggesting proposals for areas currently lacking sufficient action. The Plan proposes that current minimum standards for animal welfare be upgraded across the EU, in line with the latest scientific information and public demands. It suggests expanding these minimum standards to include species currently not covered by EU provisions. Rules should also be designed to ensure proper application and enforcement of these standards.

[More](#)

Minimising damaging animal behaviour



Tail-biting in pigs and feather pecking in poultry are two types of behaviour causing serious injuries to farm animals. Scientists are working for Welfare Quality® to design tests in order to find out what causes these damaging behaviours and how they can be minimised/prevented on commercial farms. One study investigates the effects of straw provision at different ages on the development of tail-biting to find out at which time of life the provision of straw is most effective at preventing or minimising tail-biting. In order to identify potential 'problem' pigs, this is tested by measuring the time pigs spent chewing a short length of rope (which resembles a tail) attached to a piece of board because this chewing behaviour may be related to tail-biting. Research into feather pecking is carried out by studying the

Damage that can be done by feather pecking

importance of risk factors, particularly in rearing but also in laying hens. Comparative data are being collected of both bodily states and mortality of hens as well as reports from farmers and parameters about husbandry systems. Further research looks at whether feather-pecking chickens are especially active or show an unusually high motivation to forage and to redirect foraging or other types of behaviour towards the feathers of other birds. Preliminary results show that feather-pecking chickens were more active and also preferred straw over peat. This information may indicate which types of foraging material should be provided to minimise feather pecking. [More](#)



Alleviating social stress in cattle and pigs

In order to research alleviation of social stress in farm animals, scientists investigate social aspects and management strategies that may play a role in defining the welfare levels of pigs and cattle. Four different aspects are addressed:

- Identify the variety of aggression genotypes in pigs, evaluate the social behaviour that goes along with this variety on commercial farms, and evaluate the behavioural phenotype of this variety in non-social situations.

- Compare how type and amounts of fibre in pigs' diets affect social stress and production in pregnant sows in two different housing systems: an electronic feeding system and a Biofix or "trickle feed" system.

- Evaluate the effects of social hierarchies and competition for feed on welfare of dairy and beef cattle. A completed study of dairy cows shows that social hierarchies do not affect stress or, if stress was present, the studied parameters were not useful indicators of it.

- Test whether housing systems for lactating sows and their pre-weaning piglets affect piglet play and, if so, whether different levels of play reduced later tendencies of the pigs to act aggressively against each other. This study shows that providing pigs with straw bedding and more space before weaning seems a feasible method to improve welfare, both during infancy and later in life. [More](#)

Reducing lameness in cattle and poultry



Measuring the hardness of claws

Large numbers of farm animals are affected by lameness (up to 55% of European dairy cows, 10–30 % of broilers). It is the cause of pain, it reduces animals' length of life, and restricts their behaviour. Further, it is both a major welfare concern in animal husbandry and brings with it financial losses. Dairy cows suffer mostly due to the hard concrete floors in loose housing systems. In broilers, lameness is mainly caused by disproportionate growth rates as a result of constant genetic selection and improved diet. A number of researchers throughout Europe involved in Welfare Quality® are studying tools for detecting and managing movement problems in dairy cows. They are working towards a lameness control programme that addresses the range of lameness problems known to vary between

individual herds. A second research project is concerned with promoting alternative floors to ease cattle movements. This study suggests that cows on rubber floors spend more time standing and eating and less time standing in cubicles, compared to cows on concrete floors. Slatted floors and rubber surfaces seem to have qualities that promote the right movements in dairy cattle. A third research project addresses reducing early growth rate and increasing movement with an eye to minimise leg disorders and lameness in broilers. One method which the research shows is effective at reducing leg problems is a change of feeding schedules to sequential feeding of broilers. [More](#)



'Handling stress' surveys

A survey of 88 commercial farms (involving 1073 bulls) was carried out to assess the impact on bulls of the conditions during transport to slaughter and of the bulls' previous history of reactions to transport and meat quality. The history of the bulls, including experience during transport and farmers' attitudes) and the facilities on the farms were noted. Farmers were questioned on their attitudes. Bulls' responses to loading and unloading from the truck were observed. Journey-related data were collected, and cortisol concentration at slaughter and the pH of two muscles (the *Longissimus Dorsi* and the *Rectus Abdominis*) were measured. Our study confirms that certain factors associated with transport can increase stress and limit the decline of meat pH. [More](#)

Survey in pig production

600 Dutch farmers were asked to return a completed questionnaire, including technical questions, but also statements regarding farmer's 'attitude', 'behaviour' and 'empathy' towards pigs. Farmers rated 'animal oriented activities' equal to 'management-related activities'. Differences in dealing with handling problems became apparent (such as entering and exiting a farrowing crate, training gilts to use an electronic sow feeder), but the majority of farmers claim not to have any difficulties in handling their animals. [More](#)

Fresh insights into consumer knowledge



Research conducted by social scientists working for the Welfare Quality® project has shed new light on consumers' views and concerns about farm animal welfare. Based on the results of 48 focus group interviews with over 350 consumers across 7 European countries, a detailed picture of consumers' understandings of farm animal welfare has emerged. On the one hand, the research confirms suspicions that many European consumers are geographically and mentally removed from modern farming, that they are poorly informed about specific issues of animal biology and farming practices, and that most of their knowledge is derived from their experience of pets rather than farm animals. But this is by no means the whole picture, as the research also shows that many consumers possess detailed understandings of the ethical issues behind farm animal welfare. Furthermore, many consumers are able to articulate passionate, well-informed and relevant views about what constitutes good quality of life for farm animals and the types of welfare concerns that they believe should be taken into account when monitoring and assessing welfare. Consumers show a high degree of overlap with the priorities championed by animal scientists working on Welfare Quality®. But there are also some significant differences, which are mainly about the importance that consumers attribute to small-scale, extensive, high labour-input systems that attempt to recreate more 'natural' living conditions. As such, one of the key issues for further research is how to take on board consumers' (as well as other key stakeholders such as farmers) legitimate concerns in a way that might best serve the needs of farm animals. [More](#)

Colophon

Welfare Quality Update is the electronic newsletter of the Welfare Quality® project.

This project is a European research project focussing on the integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain: from public concern to improved welfare and transparent quality. 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 animal welfare. Forty institutes and universities, representing thirteen European countries participate in this integrated research project.

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