

The consequences of introducing animal based welfare assessment in legislation and official control – an interdisciplinary seminar at SCAW, SLU 4th October 2011

*Kristina Dahlborn**, *Mia Holmberg**, *Louise Winblad von Walter[#]* & *Margareta Stéen[‡]*

* Department of Anatomy, Physiology and Biochemistry, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)

[#] Swedish Dairy Association, [‡] Swedish Centre for Animal Welfare (SCAW)

Animal welfare indicators in official animal welfare control in the Swedish Dairy

Abstract/summary: This project has used three available assessment systems for evaluating animal welfare/protection in dairy farms in four different regions in Sweden: 1) The official animal welfare inspection in Sweden (OC), 2) The Swedish Dairy Association program “Ask the cow” (AC) , 3) The Welfare Quality® (WQ) assessment protocol for dairy cows. OC mainly use resource based measures while the AC- and WQ systems use animal based measures. As reference data, welfare indicators from the Swedish Dairy Data Base (SDBB) have been used.

The project aimed to answer the following questions:

- Will the three systems rank the farms in a different order?
- Which measures/indicators contribute most within and between systems to rank the farms?
- Is there a difference in farmers’ willingness to perform changes if the assessment of poor welfare is based on animal-based measures instead of resource-based measures?
- How does the time taken to perform the different assessment systems compare with the quality and reliability of the evaluation?

The hypothesis was that all systems will identify farms with risk of having poor welfare, but systems with animal-based measures will be better in identifying farms with acceptable, enhanced and excellent welfare.

The collection of data has been performed on 41 farms in 4 Swedish counties: Jämtland, Dalarna, Södermanland and Västra Götaland. The farms were chosen by the following criteria: An official control should be planned, the farm should be a member of the dairy data base but not have performed AC before, and the farmer should accept to take part in the project. In each county the assessors from each system, were asked to rank the farms subjectively from best to worse concerning animal welfare/protection. Statistic analyses are in process to identify which measures/indicators that contributed most within and between systems to rank the farms.

There was no correlation regarding the ranking between the different assessment systems and previously identified welfare indicators from the SDBB. Overall, there was a good agreement concerning the best farms but the assessors agreed less about which farms that had the poorest welfare. Although, both WQ and AC had high scores for dirty cows at many farms this was only recorded twice with OC.

In conclusion: The systems will rank the farms in a different order, partly because they measure different parameters. For official (legal) control a combination of animal-based and resource-based measures is probably the best solution since using animal-based measures is a way of quantifying for example cleanliness, body score, lesions and important behaviors.