

## **Farm animal welfare metrics briefing (June 2018)**

The Food Ethics Council believes that in a morally progressive society good farm animal welfare is an important end in itself. We should respond to the challenges presented by today's farming methods, recognising sentience and the importance of the five freedoms, but also act to build positive welfare models, which value longevity, autonomy and relationships. Such models should not only avoid negative factors but also provide opportunities for animals to have positive experiences such as the ability to perform their natural behaviours, enjoy fresh air and daylight and experience the joy of living. It is also important to recognise that each animal is an individual, not just a member of a herd or flock.

We also believe that good farm animal welfare is essential if we are to deliver in-the-round environmental progress. Genuine sustainability must take account of environmental, social, and economic dimensions – for example soil fertility, farm animal welfare, well treated and well trained staff, and the market for quality food. It is extremely difficult to achieve good environmental outcomes while continuing to keep farm animals in the most intensive farm systems, which rely heavily on high protein feeds produced in arable monocultures, on high levels of fossil fuel and water use, and on routine medications often including human-critical antibiotics.

Over the last decade action has been taken to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change mitigation is extremely important, but should not be at the expense of biodiversity (including soil and water health), anti-microbial resistance, or improved resilience to the impacts of extreme weather. Sustainable agriculture should deliver on- and off-farm biodiversity improvements as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation. Unfortunately, when addressing greenhouse gas reductions in isolation, decisions have often been made which have resulted in the further intensification of agriculture. This in turn has had a devastating impact on nature. Climate change and biodiversity loss are of equal importance and must be addressed together.

### **Metrics collection**

There is a general assumption that suitable farm animal welfare (FAW) outcome measures (OMs) are already being collected in the supply chain and that these OMs are consistent across the supply chain. Unfortunately this is not the case. Certainly some OMs are being recorded in most supply chains but a wide variety of scoring methods are used, which makes comparison difficult. In addition, traceability to farm level is often absent.

*We are calling on the government to take action to standardise key sustainability metrics at national level.*

Standard metrics will allow farmers, food businesses, public sector procurers, and government to measure the success of inputs and will provide information to support ongoing improvements. Metrics will help improve farm efficiency and profit potential, and empower farmers to plan and deliver their own changes. Progress is most rapidly achieved when farmers are able to benchmark themselves against peers. Metrics would also enable the UK to more easily benchmark itself against other nations. We believe that a metrics-based approach will be most effective if required at national level as there is little evidence that the market has either the knowledge or willingness to move independently. It is vital that farm animal welfare metrics are incorporated as part of a range of other sustainability metrics.

While a national approach to metrics is extremely important, we believe that these measures should be implemented as part of a broader strategy to improve farm animal welfare. For example, we also urge the government to introduce financial incentives to reward farmers who achieve high welfare standards, and mandatory method of production labelling so that citizens are able to drive standards from the market place.

We encourage government to hold data nationally and to report regularly, but to work with farm assurance schemes and abattoirs to collect the information. Membership of a farm assurance scheme should become a

requirement, and all schemes should incorporate baseline metrics and be encouraged to innovate beyond minimum standards. 100% membership of farm assurance schemes provides a strong basis for improved and affordable enforcement. Excellent private metrics portals already exist and could be used to inform the government's relationship with data collection and analysis.

While personal data must be protected and anonymised at national level, it is extremely important that individual farmers are able to receive and analyse their own data so they can benchmark themselves if they choose to and so they can adjust their own farm management decisions.

### **Farm animal welfare metrics**

A central pillar for progress on farm animal welfare is the recognition of animal sentience, which must be enshrined in law. We have been pleased to see government commitments on this. Furthermore, inputs and outcomes are both important. Farm systems and other inputs are a key determinant of a producer's ability to achieve good welfare, while outcome measures provide a basis for analysing success and identifying where improvements to resources such as housing, space allowance and enrichment are necessary in order to improve outcomes.

Many farm animal welfare metrics categories focus on the existence or absence of suffering, and for this reason it is critically important to include measures relating to positive welfare such as the ability to perform natural behaviours. Accordingly we should, for example, measure the ability of laying hens to be able to properly engage in their core behaviours of foraging, perching, dust-bathing and laying their eggs in a nest. Outcomes and inputs work together to build a comprehensive picture of farm animal welfare.

Farm animal welfare metrics themselves should be considered from birth to death on a species by species basis, but the core principles are common and can be used to help ensure a good life for all farm animals. We support the Farm Animal Welfare Council's Good Life Framework, and believe that to obtain an accurate picture of welfare, outcome measures should focus on:

- Mortality
- Disease (including the use of antibiotics)
- Injury (including bruising, feather pecking, and mutilations such as tail docking)
- Mobility (for example, gait scores)
- Behaviour (an animal's ability to display behaviours, which meet their welfare wants and needs - the bedrock of farm animal welfare science)<sup>i</sup>
- Welfare during transport and at slaughter should be included in a national metrics approach, and the use of both input and outcome measures introduced for all slaughter methods. Slaughter metrics should cover transport, lairage, handling, and slaughter itself.

The quality of resources such as housing, space allowance, enrichment materials, air quality and stockmanship must also be measured as it is resources such as these that determine welfare outcomes.

Finally, we believe that metrics provide an opportunity for government to take a more joined up approach to sustainable food production and land use policy. Currently Defra takes the lead, but decisions at farm and food business level impact on the work of Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and the Department of Health and Social Care, and the reverse can also be true. We believe a more strategic approach across Government departments is needed.

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<sup>i</sup> Where reasonable outcomes measures do not exist, inputs should be used as a proxy indicator. For example, stocking density for broilers (an input) is used as a measure because measuring dust bathing and other natural behaviours is currently difficult and time consuming. In time, motion capture technology may be able to measure this natural behaviour outcome. Inputs measures may include, Housing (e.g. the use of enriched cages for laying hens, farrowing crates for sows and zero-grazing for dairy cows), Outdoor conditions e.g. the use of trees and bushes in the range provided for free range hens, Space allowance e.g. for broilers, Environmental enrichment e.g. for fattening pigs and broilers, Flooring e.g. the use of fully slatted floors for fattening pigs, Lighting levels, Air quality, Genetics e.g. the use of fast growing broilers and high yielding dairy cows, and finally, the use of behavioural mutilations to 'fit' animals to systems that do not meet their needs.