

Animal Welfare Program of Chilean Dairy Consortium

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Abstract

Since 2012 animal welfare became a priority subject for the Chilean Dairy Consortium (CDC) to work with the dairy value chain. This decision was a response to issues such as the application of the Chilean Law No. 12.380 on animal protection, the increasing consumer awareness and demands for sustainability issues, the isolated efforts of different institutions in Chile working on animal welfare, and also to progress forward with the work that links the CDC to the International Dairy Federation (IDF). The first action taken by the CDC was to invite national experts in the field to join a committee on Animal Welfare with the task to define technical guidelines and goals for an Animal Welfare Program for the Chilean dairy sector. The main objective of this program is “to install animal welfare as one of the main pillars in milk production in the dairy sector”.

Also as a result of the work of this Committee, a project was conducted with the aim of disseminating the concept of animal welfare through the dairy chain and increasing the awareness about the importance of this issue in milk production.

During this project, a survey was conducted to collect information about the situation of animal welfare in dairy farms from six regions of Chile including from the Metropolitan region to the Los Lagos region. This vast territory was divided into 3 zones: North, South-central and South.

At the same time, data was collected that allowed the development of a Chilean Protocol of Animal Welfare for Dairy Farms (CPAWDF). This protocol was based on other existing protocols such as the Welfare Quality® and APROCAL, but adapted to the needs and characteristics of Chilean dairy farms. The protocol includes direct or animal based indicators, and indirect indicators based on the resources and infrastructure provided by the dairy herd.

Direct indicators include aspects of health and welfare of milking cows, while indirect indicators cover aspects of infrastructure and cow management. This protocol was applied for an initial evaluation in each of 24 dairy farms that participated in the project. Using this result, the main priorities in animal welfare were defined for each zone. For the North Zone the main priorities were lameness and heat stress; For the South-central Zone priorities were udder health and pain management; While for the South Zone priorities were lameness and udder health. With these results, a technology transfer plan was designed with the goal of training farmers, consultants and employees, in resolving each one of the priority topics. At the end of this stage, a re-evaluation of the dairy farms was conducted with the application of animal welfare protocol, which allowed assessing the project's impact. This impact was measured through an index which at the beginning of the project was 0.47, and by the end it increased to 0.50. This improvement was achieved mainly through the improvement of indicators associated with better management practices and behavioural changes in dairy farmers and staff.

Among the products obtained from the project the most important is the Protocol on Animal Welfare. This tool will allow to conduct further training of consultants working in the field, unifying the criteria for the evaluation of dairy farms, and also, facilitating the design of technological packages to resolve welfare issues that could remain undetected without applying the protocol.

Keywords: Animal welfare, protocol, lameness, heat stress, pain management, udder health.