



1. Animal Welfare Workshop

Title presentation

A national initiative to help French dairy farmers to improve the welfare of cows

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Abstract

Within the framework of the French CRS strategy of the dairy cattle chain “France Terre de Lait”, a national scheme to improve the welfare of dairy cows has been implemented since 2019. Based on interactive consultations between stakeholders within the chain and non-profit organisations, and supported by expertise and published references, a group of 16 indicators was first selected as a basic consensus to evaluate the welfare of dairy cows. Those indicators comply with the 11 OIE principles for the welfare of dairy cattle (OIE, 2019) and match the Five Freedoms of welfare (Brambell Report, 1965). Nine indicators are measured on animals, other describe the resources offered to the cows in the building or farm practices. Although most of them were previously tested and validated in the Welfare Quality[®] project, their feasibility for on-farm routine assessments was retested in 99 dairy farms, and the method to measure some of the indicators was adapted accordingly. Then all indicators were included into Boviwell, which was an existing tool to evaluate the welfare of cattle herd, based on WQ[®] published models, with some adjustments. In a new version of Boviwell, the 16 indicators contributed either for to the calculation of welfare scores, or as complementary indicators to motivate farmers to improve, for example the management of extreme weather events, or colostrum distribution practices. The total level of welfare is calculated, but also scores for each of the Five Freedoms. Results are presented to indicate the scores of the farm and to compare them to the distribution of scores in other dairy farms, to encourage improvement.

Boviwell based welfare assessment is now part of the national Charter for Good Agricultural Practices which is a 20 years initiative for famers to progress and a guarantee for society of farming good practices. In order to provide practical solutions to improve, welfare assessment is realised by agricultural advisers who were especially trained to use the new tool. More than one thousand dairy farms have already been evaluated, with a target of all dairy farms to be evaluated within 5 years. Data are collected in a national database which is managed by inter-professional bodies. This will offer the possibility to process global analysis, to reinsure the society on the welfare management in French dairy farms, but also to identify possible gaps and progress at the chain level.