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www.welfarequalitynetwork.net



Harry Blokhuis, SLU, Sweden

Nineteen partners of the Welfare Quality Network (WQN) gathered during the first General Assembly on the first day of December 2010. During this start-up meeting the partners enjoyed extensive discussion about the various activities that we aim to develop in the Welfare Quality Network. There was broad consensus that the production of updated versions of the Welfare Quality® assessment protocols, based on new and emerging knowledge, has the highest priority. Related activities like fine-tuning of the integration process (to produce a score per farm), data handling and further dissemination of improvement strategies should also be linked to such

'updates'. The role of the Network in exchanging knowledge about ongoing projects is of course very relevant in that context.

Other points on the agenda included training of assessors, data handling, stakeholder involvement, communication, finances, etc. The General Assembly also formally approved the Management Team which now consists of Harry Blokhuis (coordinator and chair), Isabelle Veissier, Mara Miele, Hans Spoolder and Bryan Jones.

During the meeting several small working groups were created and each was given the task of clearly indicating/describing one of the activities/tasks/processes that are necessary to fulfill the WQN aims.

Dr Andrea Gavinelli (head of the Animal Welfare unit of the European Commission) also attended the meeting, gave an update on ongoing developments in the EU and underlined the relevance of the Network. The Welfare Quality Network agreement has now been signed by 25 partners and there are a lot of activities going on. Some of those are addressed in this first Newsletter. I am confident that the Welfare Quality Network will play an important role in the further development and implementation of the Welfare Quality® results!

Harry Blokhuis, Coordinator
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Welfare Quality® follow-up projects

An inventory of work carried out by the partners of the Welfare Quality Network revealed that there are no fewer than 46 projects (either running or planned) that are based on the findings of the Welfare Quality® project. At least 19 of these projects involve close collaboration with industrial partners. About another 20 of the projects focus on cattle while others feature pigs (4), laying hens (3), horses (2), broilers (1), fur animals (1), rabbits (1) and mice (1). The remaining projects include more than one species (12).

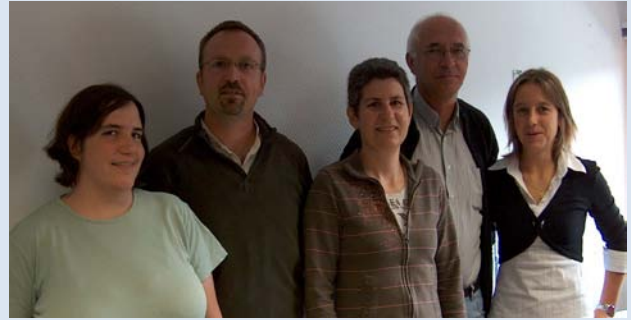
The red dots on the map give a rough indication of the countries where such projects are either underway or in the planning stage. In the next issue of WQNews an overview of the follow up projects will be presented.

Data handling: What's available so far

During the Welfare Quality® project, several mathematical models were designed to process data from the numerous welfare measures collected on farms in order to develop effective ways of evaluating them. With these models, scores are calculated to express the extent to which a farm complies with the 12 welfare criteria defined in Welfare Quality® (absence of hunger, absence of thirst, physical comfort.etc).. The criterion-scores are then synthesised into 4 principle-scores (good feeding, good housing, good health, appropriate behaviour). Principle-scores are in turn synthesised to produce an overall assessment of the farm. Detailed information on the assessment procedure is available on dedicated [webpages](#).

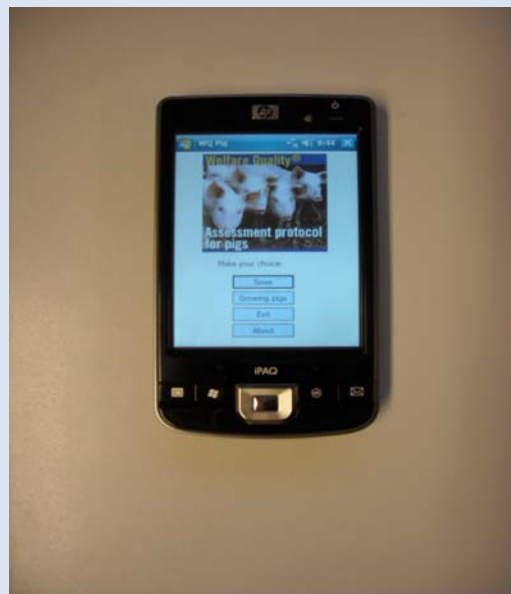
An associated software chain was also developed; this includes a communal database with data collected on farms using the Welfare Quality® protocols and a calculation formula that produces welfare scores from these data. The website also provides statistical results from data collected so far. It is possible to simulate likely improvements on a farm whose data are in the database. It is also possible to visualise scores from data loaded manually. Please visit

<http://www1.clermont.inra.fr/wq/> to learn more about this service. Anyone who wants to calculate welfare scores from data they have collected on a set of farms are invited to contact the Inra researchers who developed the tool (Anne Lamadon, anne.lamadon@clermont.inra.fr).



INRA team: Raphaëlle Botreau, Pascal Champciaux, Isabelle Veissier, Jean-Paul-Brun, Anne Lamadon

Software tools to ease the collection of data on farms are currently being developed, e.g. Inra partners designed a programme for dairy cow data that can be used on a Labtop or a TabletPC (available for free; contact: anne.lamadon@clermont.inra.fr). Software tools for PDA's are also being developed at WUR(contact: Hans.Spoolder@wur.nl).



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AssureWel project



David Main, Bristol University, UK

In the UK, the AssureWel project, supported by the Tubney Charitable Trust, is aiming to develop a field-tested framework for embedding welfare outcome methodologies into inspections, advisory support and standards development of farm assurance schemes. The multi-species five-year (2010-2015) project is led by the University of Bristol, RSPCA and Soil Association, with collaborative links with several UK industry bodies including the Red Tractor Farm Assurance scheme, Quality Meat Scotland and UK Organic Certifying Bodies. The approach taken will be to use a selected number of outcome parameters to support the existing resource-based standards. In addition a sample of 100 farms for laying hens, dairy cattle and pigs will be assessed using the full Welfare Quality® protocol in order to inform policymakers on the most appropriate priorities for the relevant farm assurance schemes. The planned timescale for introducing welfare outcomes assessments into the RSPCA and Soil Association farm assurance schemes is laying hens (year 1), dairy cattle (year 2), pigs (year 3), broilers, beef cattle and sheep (years 4-5). The project is also working in close collaboration with the Welfare Quality Network to ensure that any methodologies developed have the potential for widespread applicability.

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What happens in Spain with Welfare Quality® results?



Antonio Velarde, IRTA, Spain

Producers, retailers and other food chain actors in Spain increasingly recognize that consumer concerns for good animal welfare represent a business opportunity that could be profitably incorporated in their commercial strategies. Currently, IRTA and UAB are collaborating with the beef and pork industry to identify effective ways of integrating animal welfare in the food chain. Important objectives of these projects include the continued development and implementation of the Welfare Quality® assessment protocols for beef cattle and growing pigs in commercial conditions. This collaborative effort will enable the company to identify welfare problems at their farms, during transport and at the slaughterhouse and then aim to identify practical strategies to overcome these problems. At the same time, communication tools are being developed to provide the consumer with easily accessible and clear information about animal welfare practices.

During the last year IRTA has been working with the Catalan Meat Industry Federation

on the development of a welfare certification system for pig and cattle slaughterhouses, based on the Welfare Quality® protocols. A method of calculating scores allowing slaughterhouses to be assigned to specific welfare categories, e.g. good, enhanced, excellent, has been proposed. Two technicians from the meat industry federation have already been trained in the application of the protocols.

Other nationally funded projects are also using the Welfare Quality® approach to develop welfare assessment protocols. “Welfare of Iberian pigs in extensive conditions” is one such project. Its objective is to examine social and reproductive behaviour, general activity, and animal welfare status based on the application of standardized protocols from the Welfare Quality® project. Furthermore it aims to identify critical points, from an animal welfare perspective, during transportation to the slaughterhouse and during the slaughter of acorn-fed Iberian pigs.

For a comprehensive, holistic assessment it is essential that all criteria of the Welfare Quality® protocols are taken into consideration. Encouragingly, a set of animal based measures has already been validated for assessing physical comfort, hunger, health etc. On the other hand, a validated methodology for assessing some aspects of the animals’ emotional state, such as fear or frustration, is still required. Therefore, IRTA and UAB are currently working together to identify potential measures of certain emotional states in pigs. The project aims to identify and validate both behavioural and physiological (biomarkers) measures of this parameter, and to ultimately establish the consequences of the pig’s emotional state on welfare and final product quality.

Antonio Velarde, antonio.velarde@irta.cat

Dutch developments



Hans Spoolder, Wageningen UR Livestock Research, NL

The Dutch Ministry of Economics, Agriculture and Innovation has embraced the Welfare Quality® welfare assessment methodologies to achieve their policy aim of improving animal welfare on farm. They have identified four main applications for assessment of welfare via animal based parameters: 1) supporting welfare claims in the market, 2) applying animal based parameters to specific situations (transport, stunning & killing), 3) assessing the overall welfare of animals in our livestock industry (‘National Animal Welfare Level’) and finally 4) replacing some of the current means oriented legislation by goals oriented legislation. The driving thought behind all four applications is that if farmers and other chain stakeholders base their management more on what they see when looking at the animals, they will improve welfare status.

Almost immediately after the end of the Welfare Quality® project, the Dutch ministry began to consult with various stakeholders on how to implement the project’s

outcomes. These discussions went well: chain parties are very interested in assessing welfare through animal based parameters. However, they almost unanimously indicate that the Welfare Quality® protocols will only be used commercially if they can be made more practical. Currently data collection on one farm takes between 6 and 8 hours, which is too time consuming and expensive. In addition, the farming community indicates that there is as yet little practical experience with the methodology, and that it should be robustly tested on a small scale before wider implementation can be considered.

In response to that input the ministry has commissioned WUR – Livestock Research in Lelystad and the Dutch Animal Health Services (GD) in Deventer to carry out a study aimed at simplifying the existing protocols for dairy cattle, veal calves, pigs, laying hens and broilers. They have also asked WUR to develop protocols for horses and rabbits. This work is currently being done, by collecting Welfare Quality® data on approximately 150 farms per species. In addition, data is being collected at abattoirs where appropriate. All the data will be analysed for correlations in an effort to find the least time consuming set of measures that still provide sufficient and reliable information on every criterion in the Welfare Quality® framework. For the training of the assessors, and the analyses of the data, the researchers have involved members of the WQ Network. In total the ministry invests nearly 1 million euro in this simplification step.

The second step is a large scale project over three years, in which animal welfare will be assessed regularly (once every 6 months) on at least 50 farms per species. Farmers will be informed about the outcomes and supported when setting up farm improvement plans together with trained advisors, and through

discussions in meetings with other farmers. Scientists will not only analyse the welfare data obtained on farm but will also examine the profitability of the enterprise as well as specific issues like changes in management and job satisfaction. This study receives matched funded from the Dutch Product Boards, and will involve a total investment by the ministry and the Boards of 4 million Euros.

We at Lelystad are very keen to work together with other partners in the WQ Network on these two exciting steps. We are actively seeking partners with whom we can exchange data, training methods and overall ways of working. We are also developing software tools (e.g. for PDA's) to facilitate recording of the measures on farm as well as associated software to analyse the data. These will become available for others to use. Please get in touch if you see opportunities for collaboration!

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Colophon

WQNews is the electronic newsletter of the Welfare Quality Network project.

This is a European Network of researchers focussing on the updating, implementation and communication about the Welfare Quality® project's results. Twentysix institutes and universities, representing thirteen European countries and four Latin American countries, participate in this network.

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