

Evaluating “Animal Welfare Payments” of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy

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Research Question

Animal welfare has become increasingly important to citizens and research studies regularly reveal animal welfare problems such as high mortalities and production diseases.

As a response, agricultural support policies in the framework of the EUs Rural Development Plan (RDP) have been introduced to improve animal welfare.

To find out whether the RDP-measure “Animal Welfare Payments” is effective in supporting welfare friendly husbandry, we evaluated this measure for the German federal state of North-Rhine Westphalia. Our evaluation focussed on assessing if the measure achieves its goal of supporting farms with a “good” animal welfare status.

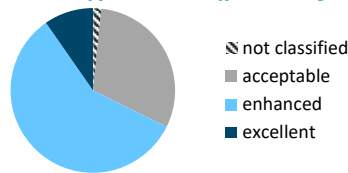
The analysis concentrates on dairy farms, as these represent the most important group of agricultural holdings supported by the “Animal Welfare Payments”.

Results

The results of the three animal welfare assessment systems showed - with a high degree of variation - good results as well as significant animal welfare problems on the supported farms:

- Welfare Quality® assessment: A majority of the supported farms qualified for the categories “enhanced” (58 %) and “excellent” (10 %). One third was in the category “acceptable”, one farm in the lowest category. Problems were identified in the “welfare principles” of animal health and feeding.

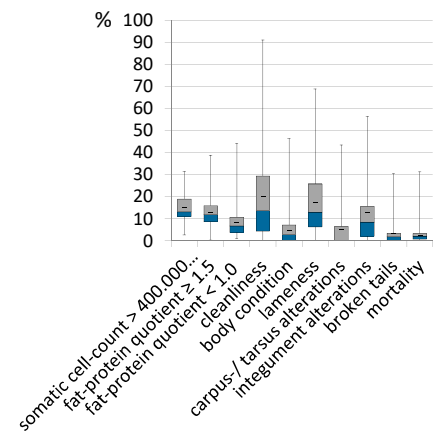
FIG 1: Welfare Quality® Overall Assessment
Share of farms in the different categories



- The resource-oriented assessment confirms problems with access to water (82 % of the supported farms) and points

out other critical aspects such as poor conditions for calving (52 %) and resting (47 %).

FIG 2: Results of the 10 Health Indicators
Share of animals with health problems



- Health indicator analysis showed relevant prevalence of lameness (Ø 17 %) and mastitis (Ø 17 %).

Methods & Data

Up to now, there is no generally accepted methodology for the evaluation of animal welfare effects. We therefore applied three different animal welfare assessment systems:

- The Welfare Quality® protocols (The Welfare Quality® Consortium, 2009)
- A resource-oriented assessment tool (KTBL, 2006)
- 10 health indicators which cover the most important welfare issues in dairy farming (March et al. 2017)



The evaluation of the Animal Welfare Payments was carried out for dairy farms. Farmers participating in the measure committed for a five-year period either to “access to pasture” or “provision of straw” or a combination of the two.

Premia ranged between 30 – 37 Euro per livestock unit (LU) and year.

The data collection was carried out in 2013/2014 on a stratified random sample of 62 dairy farms participating in the support measure (N ~ 2.000). The data was primarily analysed using descriptive statistics.

Additionally (results not presented in this poster), relationships between particular indicators and assessment systems were identified and differences between farming systems and sub-measures analysed by means of non-parametric tests.

Conclusions

To improve the effectiveness of the measure in supporting animal welfare, modifications should be introduced. The resource-oriented requirements could be adapted to provide for better access to water, adequate cubicles and calving pens. Additionally, as the provision of housing requirements cannot address issues of animal health, result-oriented elements need to be introduced into the political measure to cover these important aspects of animal welfare.

Bibliography

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