

ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH UNIT (APLHA)

Network on Animal Health and Welfare Minutes of the 17th meeting

Held on 28-29 June 2021, videoconference

(Agreed on 14 July 2021)

Participants

- Network Representatives of Member States (including EFTA Countries):**

Country	Name
Austria	Apologies
Belgium	Ester Peeters
Bulgaria	Nadezhda Lukanova
Croatia	Tomislav Mikus
Cyprus	Apologies
Czech Republic	Apologies
Denmark	Else Enemark
Estonia	Apologies
Finland	Taina Mikkonen
France	Charlotte Dunoyer, Julie Chiron
Germany	Apologies
Greece	Katerina Marinou
Hungary	Apologies
Ireland	Stephanie Ronan
Italy	Sara Rota Nodari
Latvia	Rudite Varna
Lithuania	Apologies
Luxembourg	Apologies
Malta	Gemma Pantaleo
Netherlands	Johan Bongers
Poland	Przemyslaw Cwynar
Portugal	Maria Correia
Romania	Apologies
Slovakia	Zuzana Hurníková
Slovenia	Arnej Galjiot
Spain	Teresa Villalba, Ana Lorena Solar de Frutos
Sweden	Arja Helena Kautto
Iceland	Thora Johanna Jónasdóttir
Liechtenstein	Apologies
Norway	Dean Basic
Switzerland	Liv Sigg

- **European Commission:**

Lucie Carrouee, Taxiarchis Theocharis

- **EFSA:**

ALPHA Unit: Denise Candiani (Chair), Chiara Fabris, Yves Van der Stede, Eliana Lima, Mimi Kalcheva, Cristina Rapagnà

- **Members of AHAW Panel:**

Antonio Velarde, Hans Spoolder

- **Members of EFSA's Working Groups:**

Marta Brscic, Laura Boyle, Niamh O'Connell, Sandra Edwards

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed the participants.

Apologies were received from Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Romania.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

3. Agreement of the minutes of the 16th meeting of the AHAW Network held on 1- 2 July 2019, Parma

The minutes were agreed by written procedure on 17 July 2019 and published on the EFSA website.

4. Topics for discussion

4.1. EFSA presentation of the recent work on Animal Welfare

A presentation was given about the most recent work carried over by EFSA in the field of Animal Welfare.

EFSA (Denise Candiani) described in detail the welfare mandates under the framework of the F2F strategy: background, request, target populations, Terms of Reference and adoption timelines. The F2F Strategy foresees a comprehensive evaluation of the current EU animal welfare legislation with the view to its possible revision. In preparation to that, in June 2020 EFSA received five mandates from the EC, requesting a comprehensive and updated assessment of the scientific knowledge related to AW of calves, laying hens, pigs, broilers and terrestrial animals during transport. Due to the complexity of the mandate on the protection of animals during transport (i.e. six animal categories to be considered, six group of practices to be described and seven specific scenarios to be further assessed), EFSA will address it by delivering two different SOs, one on free moving animals and the second on animals in containers. The six SOs will be produced with different deadlines starting from June 2022 to March 2023.

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4.2. Presentation of the current Animal Welfare activities from the EC (Lucie Carrouee from G5 Unit SANTE)

The EC representative presented the ongoing activities on AW:

- Summary of outcomes from the evaluation of the EU AW strategy: the aim was to assess the extent to which the EU Strategy 2012-2015 delivered against its intended objectives. It emerged that problems and drivers are still relevant and there is a need to take legislative steps. The Commissioner presented the EC proposal of a revised EU AW legislation by 2023 to align with latest scientific evidence, broaden its scope, make it easier to enforce and ensure a higher level of animal welfare. In May 2020 a roadmap was published launching the "fitness check" of the current AW legislation. In June 20, the EC requested mandates to EFSA on pigs, broilers, laying hens, calves and transport, in June 21 an additional mandate on ducks, geese and quails focusing on cages. Preliminary conclusions of the fitness check were also presented as well as its next steps.
- Farm to Fork Strategy and options for animal welfare labelling: a study on animal welfare labelling is to be concluded in December 2021. The subgroup on welfare labelling of the AW platform recommends developing an EU animal welfare label. Next steps under consideration in the COM.
- Citizen initiative "End of cage": the initiative was submitted in October 2020, and managed to pass 1.4 Million signatures to prohibit use of cages (laying, rabbits, broilers, quails, sows, calves). The initiative calls the phasing out to become effective in 2027. An official reply from EC will be published soon.
- Animal welfare during transport: following some incidents and beside future revision of the legislation, shorter actions will be put in place by EC e.g. request to OIE to be proactive, projects on audits for transport, implementing act, act in strict liaison with the ANIT Committee of Parliament.
- EU reference centres for AW were included in the revised official control regulation to provide assistance to EC.
- Pilot projects originally proposed by the EU Parliament but implemented through EC: alternative methods to surgical castration, alternative egg production systems, dairy cows (transport end of career, best practices for keeping them), non-aversive stun methods for pigs.

4.3. Presentation on "Main findings and conclusions from the Animal welfare indicators project from EC" (Taxiarchis Theocharis from F2 Unit SANTE)

Taxiarchis Theocharis presented the Commission project about indicators for AW: this is a two year audit project of DG SANTE Directorate F for assessing welfare on farms with the aim to understand what approach and objectives MS have for AW, in particular: I) strategic approach, with objectives for animal welfare, ii)

"quality management system" for controls, iii) reports based on reliable data, iv) picture of animal welfare on farm, based on "indicators".

This was a 2-year project (2019-2020) on the use of indicators in farms of about 5-6 EU countries, after analysing multi annual report plans, schemes for AW from industry and from academia. The scope covered broiler, pig and dairy cattle. A final report will be published.

The main outcome is the verification of compliance with AW legislation to ensure that the AW status of the animals in EU is at high standards. With minor exceptions, most of MS failed to demonstrate if or to what extent they meet their expectations. This is because there is no alignment with operation objectives - i.e. how MSs intend to monitor the process – and because operators are using AW indicators, but they don't have a universal indicator or set of indicators.

The main challenge is the complexity of the measurement system: it demands more to succeed, one indicator alone will not cover the complexity of AW (e.g. a bird with no foot pad dermatitis does not exclude that it might have suffered from heat stress). Another challenge is the so-called "regulatory dilemma": with few exceptions, most MSs are hesitating to assess welfare when there is no legal framework. There is a need to enhance stakeholder engagement.

In overall, it was concluded that it is feasible to establish a measurement system so it is feasible to monitor if AW improves or gets worst at national level.

4.4. Presentation of the European Animal Welfare Reference Centre

Hans Spoolder presented an update on the European Animal Welfare Reference Centres that were set via EU Reg 625/2017 on official controls.

The first centre was set up in 2018 and dedicated to the welfare of pigs, being this a priority for the enforcement of EU Directive 120/2008. The centre was assigned to a network composed by Wageningen University (NL), Aarhus University (DK) and FLI (DE). The second was set up in 2020 on poultry and assigned to Aarhus University (Denmark), IRTA (Spain) and IZS (Italy) coordinated by ANSES (France). The third centre was set up in May 2021 on ruminants and equines and is coordinated by SLU (Sweden), UCD (Ireland), INRAE (France) and IZS (Italy, Teramo), Greece, BOKU (Austria).

The main scopes of the centres are five: i) to provide scientific and technical expertise (e.g. on 98/58, 1/2005 and 1099), ii) develop animal welfare indicators, iii) develop methods of assessment and improvement, iv) support scientific and technical studies, v) promote training in Member States and non-EU Countries and v) ultimately disseminate research findings and technical innovations.

Target groups are the competent authorities, policy workers etc. It means the centres cannot respond to farmers, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Dissemination of results is achieved through a website for the pig centre: EURCAW-PIGS.EU. The other two reference centres will also soon set up a website.

Examples of core activities of the centres:

1. Coordinated assistance: meeting CAs and policy workers via regional meetings, responding to questions regarding implementation of legislation

e.g. 1 question already received for(ruminants, 4 questions received for poultry in 2020, 5 questions in 2019 and 8 questions in 2020 for pigs. Most of the questions are about interpretation of the legislation, e.g. what is enough, what is sufficient. When there are open norms the centre can provide the requestor with background scientific information (e.g. a question received about when a pig is considered as an adult: the centre cannot respond legally but can provide the biological basis to understand it). Questions and answers are published on the website and are anonymous.

2. Scientific and technical advice: advice produced about richness of the environment; welfare of broilers in different housing systems; water bath stunning; 8 dossiers produced on key welfare areas: e.g. transport conditions, tail biting and stunning of pigs. One new dossier in 2021 on heat stress.
3. Develop animal welfare indicators: dossiers being produced for welfare of broilers on farm, welfare of laying hens in alternative systems, electrical water bath stunning for broilers and turkeys. New for 2021: indicators for rabbits.
4. Training: Training is organised in support to national initiatives. SAVE THE DATE: 21 OCTOBER 2021 • 45 min lecture about WB stunning in broilers and evaluation of consciousness • 45 min discussion

4.5. Information exchange among Member States

Presentation from Italy:

The Italian representative presented a project called Classyfarm. Classyfarm is a system started in 2008 to check biosecurity in farms, then other records were added i.e. AMR, slaughter, then in 2015 welfare records i.e. cattle and pigs from 2017 and then the others.

The system therefore combines all these aspects. It can be used for biosecurity and welfare checks by official vets, and the farmers can use it for self-assessments.

For AMR, the system works via automated system for electronic prescription where the CA can monitor constantly the use of antimicrobials in any farm.

Finally, official vets can do monitoring at slaughter on a voluntary basis.

The system is included in the national vet system and any vet can access it; the system is adapted for use with tablet devices. Vets can see general data of the SH and can access to the questionnaires that were completed. Four sections are present in the system to record welfare at slaughter – for now it is only implemented for pigs – at batch level or individual level.

Ante mortem checks are performed at unloading – usually regarding the batch e.g. downer pigs, lameness, anaemia, ear and skin lesions, DA, cachexia, dyspnea, tail lesions, manure on the body for > 30%. For post-mortem the record can be more accurate and is performed at batch level e.g. lung lesions (mycoplasma lesions, pericarditis, pneumonia), liver alterations, presence of abscesses, skin lesions, manure on the body.

Then the vet can carry out inspections at individual animal level – this is usually carried out by two vets otherwise the line speed is too quick for one vet only. For the same reason, a maximum of two batches of animals can be inspected per day. The two vets check every single animal. Records to be entered are divided in health-related ABMs and welfare ABMs. The first question is about tail docking (yes or no), the second on tail lesion (4 levels from = no lesions to 3= severe lesions with necrosis), then rear skin lesions and back skin lesions (again with score 0 to 3), lung lesions (0= no lesions, 4= lesions in both lung lobes), skin score from grade 1 to 3 to detect presence of dermatitis from absent to a generalised severe level, then gastric score, rating from 0= no lesions to 3 = severe ulcers.

At the moment the system is on progress and automatic reports are only visible by CAs.

Farms can be visualised on a map and it is possible to compare e.g. the rate of tail docking and compare farms. Farms are then classified into excellent, improvable and inadequate for the different records.

For the ABMs at slaughter the system was put in place very recently so in general it is a testing phase. Should the project continue, there will be a step 2 that foresees validation of the system and a step 3 will for the inclusion of other species.

Questions & Answers:

- is this system linked to information from transporters? Not in this system, transport information is recorded in another system, so the information exists but the 2 systems don't communicate yet.
- is there a feedback system? Yes, to the farmer, because this is the goal but at the moment it's a trial.
- will the system be enforced in legislation? The other parts of the system – biosecurity, AMR - are being discussed now in the Italian Parliament to be included in the legislation, the slaughter part not yet.
- what scientific sources were used for the scoring system? The scoring system for the lung lesions from Italian publications, the tail and skin from the pig guidelines.

Presentation from Iceland:

Thora Jónasdóttir presented a similar project from the Nordic Council of Ministers for microbiology and animal health and welfare. The objective is to evaluate animal-based welfare indicators and develop common and practical scoring system that can be used when carrying out official inspections at farms in the Nordic countries (EU and national legal framework may be different e.g. Finland, Sweden and Denmark usually have stricter national frameworks). Welfare quality protocols are complex and time consuming for a practical use in routine inspections. Therefore, the need for a simplified scheme emerged. At slaughter information is collected for i. body condition score, ii. lameness, iii. injuries, iv. cleanliness so it is a limited number of indicators. If animals are scored red, then it is a non-compliance. Then scores can be summed up and farms can be scored as green, yellow or red. Farmers, even red, appreciated the system that give them feedback and considered it a tool to help avoiding future non-compliances.

Presentation from The Netherlands:

Johan Bongers presented a Dutch project on the use of slaughterhouse data for evaluation animal welfare of veal calves in the Netherlands.

4.6. Exercises on “Identification of ABMs for pigs and calves at slaughter”

The second part of the meeting was dedicated to an exercise for the identification of ABMs for pigs and calves at slaughter. A separate report will be published on EFSA's website including the outcomes of the exercise.

5. Date for next meeting

Next meeting will be held in spring 2022 (date to be fixed).