



Implementing welfare outcomes
in assurance schemes to improve
the welfare of farmed animals

Alison Bond

Project Partners

AssureWel is a collaborative project between the University of Bristol, RSPCA and the Soil Association

Total grant from the Tubney Charitable Trust of £2.7million to the project partnership



Five year project starting in June 2010



Project Team

University of Bristol

- Dr David Main
- Dr Siobhan Mullan
- Dr Andy Butterworth

Soil Association

- Chris Atkinson
- Alison Bond & Iain Rogerson

RSPCA

- Julia Wrathall
- Marc Cooper & Anna Fraser

Soil Association Project Team

Soil Association

- Chris Atkinson - Head of Standards
- Alison Bond - Senior Project Officer
- Kate Still - Animal Welfare Advisor

Soil Association Certification Limited

- Iain Rogerson – Regional Inspector Manager
- Madeleine Neale – Veterinary Advisor

Project Goals

Goal 1:

To deliver optimum welfare assurance within RSPCA Freedom Food and Soil Association certification schemes

Goal 2:

Promote uptake of outcome-based assurance within UK and European farm assurance schemes

Goal 1: Embedding in certification

A small number (approx. 5) of 'core' outcome measures will be chosen for each species to be assessed by inspectors at every annual inspection in both schemes

The project will focus on laying hens, dairy cattle, pigs, broilers, beef and sheep

The measures will be trialled on farm to test the practicality of using them at inspection

Goal 1: Embedding in certification

Once the measures have been decided, all SACL and relevant FF inspectors will be trained

Repeatability between assessors will be a key focus of the training

At inspection:

Inspectors will assess welfare of livestock using the 'core' measures

Goal 1: Embedding in certification

At inspection (ctd):

The results will be given to the producer with the inspection report

Producer support:

If any issues are highlighted the inspector will be able to indicate sources of information and/or put the producer in contact with the animal welfare advisor

Goal 1: Embedding in certification

Ensuring farmers understand their outcome assessment results and, with information and advice provided, use the results of their outcome assessment in the most useful and effective way to improve welfare

Goal 1: Embedding in certification

The results gathered will:

- be used to provide an average benchmark for individual farm results at inspection
- evidence the level of welfare within the scheme
- provide an evidence base for standards review and development

Simplifying standards

As long as the welfare of the animal is protected (measured by the outcome), then prescriptive detail relating to certain aspects of housing/management in the standards could be reduced.

This would give producers greater freedom to develop the system that works in their conditions on their farm (within the organic system) whilst ensuring welfare remains protected.

Benefits to SA licensees

- Improve animal welfare (key driver for consumers in buying organic)
- Protect the market
- Simplify standards
- Challenge aspects of conventional systems for holistic production methods

Goal 2: Engagement

UK Policy Forums

- Ruminant, poultry and pig forums will be set up to engage with the key stakeholders in each sector

Annual Livestock Seminar

- An annual report and livestock seminar will allow our learnings to be published to a wider audience

Goal 2: Engagement

Advice support network

- Training will be available for vets and external advisers in the welfare outcomes approach and how to advise and support producers

European Farm Assurance Platform

- Engage with the European farm assurance platform to promote welfare outcomes

Additional objectives

Broiler project

- to come up with a method to assess/compare welfare across a range of broiler systems - welfare label?

Qualitative Behavioural Assessment

- to trial and develop a database to collect data

Welfare Quality® inspections

- to trial WelfareQuality® protocols on a random sample of SA and FF farms for practicality and provide detailed information that can aid the decision of the core measures

WelfareQuality®

5 year project, funded by the EC, involving 13 European and 4 Latin-American countries

Objective: To develop European standards for on-farm welfare assessment and product information systems as well as practical strategies for improving animal welfare

Finished last year - outcome measure assessment protocols published for cattle (dairy & beef), poultry (layers & broilers) and pigs (breeding & finishing)



www.welfarequality.net

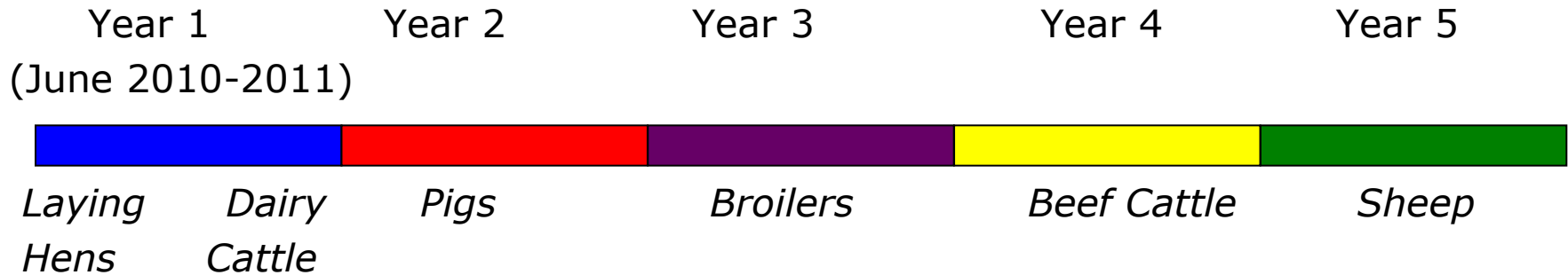


WelfareQuality® visits

- Year one sampling exercise
- A random sample of SACL and FF farms
- 150 FF farms and 150 SACL farms will have a Welfare Quality® assessment conducted.
- The 150 farms will include 50 of each laying hens, dairy cattle and finishing pigs
- Completely voluntary
- The advisor will be available for producer enquiries

Timeline

Timescale for introducing outcome measures into Freedom Food and Soil Association certification annual inspections:



At the end of year 3 there will be a strategic review of the implementation of the first three species. If satisfactory, the project will continue onto the implementation of broilers

Progress so far...

- Identified core measures for laying hens and completed pilot visits in partnership with Stonegate
- Developing feedback and advice systems
- Training of inspectors and full integration into inspection systems – anticipated training dates in March
- In addition, a sub-study using the comprehensive WelfareQuality® protocols will be completed in the first year – training in laying hens and cattle completed

