Designing animal welfare policies and monitoring progress

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Abstract

A single solution to promote higher animal welfare across the whole EU is unlikely due to significant regional differences and because what is most appropriate for each region depends on many factors. Based on analyses of eight member and candidate EU countries, this paper provides a conceptual framework, an ‘animal welfare roadmap’, which can be used to assess the stage of maturity of a country in farm animal welfare policy development and identify appropriate policy instruments and indicators to monitor progress towards higher animal welfare. The ‘roadmap’ consists of five sequential stages: increasing compliance with legislation; raising awareness; product development; mainstreaming; and integration of animal welfare with other issues. For each stage, specific policy instruments are identified alongside the category of stakeholders most likely to be influential in the implementation of each instrument. The policy instruments used to achieve these stages are those used by government departments/agencies, private enterprises, academic bodies or non-governmental organisations who formulate standards for animal welfare. These are supported by indicators best suited to document their effectiveness. Although we have emphasised how different situations and contexts within the EU mean that there is no single optimal policy instrument for the EU as a whole, but rather appropriate policy instruments should be selected according to the stage of development of a country or sector, we do propose a harmonised choice of indicators to allow benchmarking of changes at the EU level with regard to progress towards animal welfare.

Keywords: animal-based measures, animal welfare, animal welfare assessment, policy, policy indicators, policy instruments

Introduction

McInerney (2004) was among the first to discuss in detail the issue of how to define appropriate animal welfare policy objectives. More recently, the Farm Animal Welfare Council of the UK listed the relative strengths and weaknesses of different types of government intervention (FAWC 2008) and there has been considerable work related to animal welfare policy since (see Bennett & Appleby 2010; Vapnek & Chapman 2010 for overviews). Examples of the types of instruments to promote good animal welfare discussed in the literature include legislation, capacity building, labelling, cross-compliance, information and education programmes. However, despite some recent attempts by academics and policy-makers to present different policy instruments to improve animal welfare across the EU, rarely is it taken into account that specific conditions and/or indicators are better suited to some situations than others.

EU member states differ widely in their stage of economic and market development, geographical conditions that influence the farming systems and in their cultural attitudes to animal welfare (Evans & Miele 2008). Hence, this diversity generates differences not only in the nature of the social debate on farm animal welfare but on how various policy instruments to improve animal welfare should be implemented. For example, farm animals may enjoy good standards of care in a country where there is little or no discussion about welfare per se, but where traditional management methods already promote good health and permit a high degree of behavioural freedom. The reverse may also be true. In some countries there may be much discussion about animal welfare, but no or few policies in place to improve it. Although the issues are usually linked, the relationship between maturity in animal welfare policymaking and animal welfare per se is not necessarily linear and different indicators are required to monitor development. The word ‘maturity’ is used to reflect the degree of insight into animal welfare as an ‘issue’ or ‘topic of debate’ in a country and so too its stage of development in animal welfare policy. Based on the results from two previous analyses which help to determine this ‘maturity’ in different European countries, this paper develops a conceptual framework by which any country can classify itself in terms of its maturity in the