Broiler chicken welfare assessment in GLOBALGAP® certified and non-certified farms in Brazil

APO Souza, EC de Oliveira Sans, BR Müller and CFM Molento*

Federal University of Paraná, Rua dos Funcionários, 1540, 80035-050, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil
* Contact for correspondence and requests for reprints: carlamolento@ufpr.br

Abstract

Regarding broilers, Brazil is the third largest producer and the leading chicken meat exporter in the world. Independent certifications are required by some importers in the European Union (EU) to guarantee compliance with minimum welfare requirements. Our objective was to compare broiler chicken welfare in GLOBALGAP® certified (C) and non-certified (N) intensive farms in the State of Paraná, Brazil, using the Welfare Quality® protocol. Ten farms in each group were evaluated and data were transformed using scores that ranged from 0 to 100, where 100 is the best condition. Results suggested that farms adhered to minimum welfare standards, regardless of certification and that the adoption of standards based on overseas rules may have limitations for the improvement of animal welfare. In order to further improve broiler welfare in Brazil, more rigorous standards should be developed.

Keywords: animal-based assessment, animal welfare, certification, chicken, international trade, Welfare Quality®

Introduction

Poultry is the most traded category of meat in the world, and Brazil is the leading broiler chicken meat exporter (FAO 2013; UBAEF 2014). Animal welfare is becoming increasingly important to international trade (Rushen et al 2011), and information on the husbandry conditions of farm animals may influence the purchasing behaviour of consumers (Verbeke 2009). Thus, welfare requirements have been included as a quality attribute by companies in a strategy to promote welfare standards on their products (Main 2008). As regards the export of poultry in Brazil, GLOBALGAP® is the main certification required, especially for those exporting to the European Union (EU). This certification stands for good agricultural practices, including food safety, sustainable production methods, worker and animal health and welfare. Certification schemes may also be helpful in guaranteeing more competitive conditions for farmers in countries with welfare regulations compared with products imported from countries without a specific welfare code (Ingenbleek et al 2012). International publications have highlighted deficiencies in the welfare policies of developing countries (Van Horne & Achterbosch 2008; Robins & Phillips 2011), and the weakness of such regulations in these countries, including Brazil, are often considered to lead to poor animal welfare. However, recent evidence-based comparisons of broiler welfare have challenged this interpretation (Tuyttens et al 2014).

Welfare assessment schemes tend to be based on farm resources and management practices, called inputs. However, animal-based measures, or outcomes, focus on animals and have the advantage of allowing comparisons to be made across farming systems (Heath et al 2014). The Welfare Quality® protocol based welfare assessment on mostly animal-based measures (Welfare Quality® 2009), and so the scores obtained in each measure may be compared between different farms. Despite this possibility, only a small number of publications using this protocol exist for broiler chickens.

Considering that farm production schemes in the European Union (EU) contain animal welfare requirements that comply with local regulations or go beyond the legal minimum (Veissier et al 2008), it is expected that these certifications would improve animal welfare in regions where no specific welfare policy is in place. According to Ingenbleek et al (2012), solutions to improve animal welfare should consider the context of each country, so evidence-based knowledge of the effects of international certification schemes on animal welfare is important to improve discussion on the system benefits in different countries. With this in mind, our objective was to compare broiler chicken welfare in GLOBALGAP® certified and non-certified intensive broiler farms in the State of Paraná, Brazil, using the Welfare Quality® protocol.