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## **Farm membership of voluntary welfare schemes results in better compliance with animal welfare legislation in Great Britain**

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### **Abstract**

The Action Plan of the European Commission 2006–2010 proposed a move towards more private and less state regulation of animal welfare and Great British (GB) Governments made a commitment to reduce the burden of inspection of farms by targeting high-risk enterprises. In previous research in GB, farmers in private, voluntary regulated schemes were more compliant with GB legislation and code at statutory welfare inspections made by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) than farmers not in such schemes. The current study investigated whether membership of other private voluntary regulators and national data sources were associated with greater compliance with welfare at APHA inspections and whether the previous association between greater compliance and membership of private schemes persisted. Compliance at APHA inspections remained higher on farms in the private schemes previously investigated. It was also higher in the one retailer and seven herd health schemes investigated. There was no association between non-welfare EU cross-compliance inspections and compliance at APHA inspections. Approximately 90% of farmers in a scheme passed animal welfare inspections compared with 80% of non-scheme members. We conclude that farms in private schemes are more likely to pass APHA inspections and so this criterion can be used in selection of farms for risk-based inspection. We hypothesise that private regulation with regular inspection of all farms could raise compliance with animal welfare legislation to at least the minimum legal standards, however, it could result in animals with low welfare being concealed; consequently, this hypothesis requires testing.

**Keywords:** animal welfare, farm animals, government legislation, herd health scheme, inspections, private regulation