

© 2019 Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,
Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK
www.ufaw.org.uk

Animal Welfare 2019, 28: 173-181
ISSN 0962-7286
doi: 10.7120/09627286.28.2.173

Farm manager involvement in an equine on-farm welfare assessment: opportunities for education and improvement

C DuBois^{†§}, TJ DeVries^{†§}, DB Haley^{‡§}, P Lawlis^{†§} and K Merkies*^{†§}

[†] Department of Animal Biosciences, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1G 2W1

[‡] Department of Population Medicine, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1G 2W1

[§] Campbell Centre for the Study of Animal Welfare, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1G 2W1

* Contact for correspondence and requests for reprints: kmerkies@uoguelph.ca

Abstract

Previous work surveying equine professionals has suggested ignorance to be a primary cause of poor welfare within the industry, highlighting the importance of improving educational opportunities for industry stakeholders. This may be achieved through on-farm assessments designed to evaluate facilities and share resources with farm owners. While used extensively for evaluating production animal facilities, equine facilities are rarely formally assessed, making it important to determine how well those assessments would be received by equine owners and managers. As part of a larger project, an on-farm equine welfare assessment tool was pilot-tested on a sample of diverse horse farms ($n = 26$). Farm managers completed a self-assessment to determine their perception of their own farms with respect to animal welfare and then participated in the on-farm assessment process. Post-assessment interviews allowed participants to provide feedback regarding their experience. Farm managers most often underestimated the prevalence of structural issues in their facilities but were more discerning in management-related elements (eg stall cleanliness). Descriptive analysis indicated that farm managers felt that the on-farm assessment tool had the potential to be useful to newcomers to the industry and for a certification programme. Participants also highlighted areas that could make enforcing welfare standards an issue, such as horse and farm ownership. Understanding the perception of on-farm assessments is useful to gauge the potential success of animal care assessment programmes. If well-received, an industry-driven, on-farm welfare assessment has the potential to better educate horse farm managers and, by extension, improve the welfare of the animals under their care.

Keywords: animal welfare, assessment, education, equine, on-farm, stable yard