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Willingness of Dutch broiler and pig farmers to convert to production systems with improved welfare

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Abstract

The present study investigated 15 broiler and 13 fattening pig farmers' willingness-to-convert to alternative production systems with higher animal welfare standards compared to conventional production systems in The Netherlands, and explored the main barriers to the adoption of these alternative systems. Alternative production systems were categorised, according to whether farmers were required to make reversible or irreversible changes to the current farm. Two out of the four pig systems in the study were considered as reversible, whereas the other two as irreversible. One out of the four broiler systems presented was considered as reversible, whereas the other three as irreversible. Results show that to convert to a system requiring irreversible changes 83 and 85% (figures for each of the two irreversible systems) of the surveyed fattening pig farmers required a 30% or higher increase in their family income, while to convert to a system requiring reversible changes 8 and 23% of the pig farmers required a similar level of increase. Also, for each of the three irreversible systems, 62, 64 and 87% of the surveyed broiler farmers required a 30% or higher increase in their family income to a system requiring irreversible changes, while to convert to a system requiring reversible changes, 20% of the broiler farmers required a similar level of increase. Thirty-eight and 62% of the fattening pig farmers and 40% of the broiler farmers were willing to convert to the specific systems that allowed reversible changes if they knew they could earn the same income as they did in their current system. This study highlights a number of reasons for farmers' reluctance to switch to alternative systems: perceived uncertainty about price premiums, lack of space on the farm, scarcity of land nearby the farm, risk of disease spread, the existing farm set-up, prohibition of tail docking, allowing for castration, and views that proposed alternatives were 'farmer-unfriendly' or impractical.

Keywords: animal welfare, barriers to adoption, broiler production, contingent valuation, farmers' decision-making, pig production