The willingness of conventional farmers to participate in animal welfare programmes: an empirical study in Germany

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Abstract

In recent years, poor farm animal welfare (FAW) has been a continual focus of public criticism and, in many European countries, large segments of society have repeatedly demanded higher FAW standards. In spite of these demands, there are hardly any products from pure animal welfare programmes (AWPs) on the market. Given this background, farmers are a very important stakeholder group for the successful implementation of such programmes, but little is known about their attitudes towards the introduction of AWPs. For this study, 657 conventional farmers in Germany were questioned about FAW and AWPs via an online survey. Three clusters (farmer groups) were identified with respect to their attitudes towards AWPs and, based on these clusters, various target groups were determined for participation in AWPs. Cluster A (the ‘sceptical animal welfare opponents’) (n = 204) is characterised by strong opposition to AWPs and higher welfare standards in livestock husbandry. Farmers in this cluster will probably not take part in AWPs, especially because they do not consider AWPs profitable. Cluster B (the ‘undecided’) (n = 229) have diverse attitudes towards AWPs. As they do not reject the enhancement of animal welfare standards, these farmers may someday become willing to participate in AWPs. Cluster C, (the ‘market-conscious animal welfare friends’) (n = 224) have the most positive attitudes of the sample towards AWPs. However, even these farmers have diverse attitudes towards the monetary effects of AWP. Overall, they constitute the most important potential target group for AWPs as they indicate the highest willingness to take part in these programmes. The empirical results have important managerial implications and provide a starting point for the design of tailor-made strategies to increase the market penetration of AWPs.

Keywords: animal welfare, attitudes, cluster analysis, factor analysis, farmers, Germany

Introduction

In the recent past, improving farm animal welfare (FAW) has received growing attention and this topic has caught the interest not only of the media and the general public but also of politicians (Keeling & Kjærnes 2009; Norwood & Lusk 2009; Nocella et al 2010; Lusk & Norwood 2012; Keeling et al 2013). In several EU member states, reports have indicated the need to improve welfare standards for farm animals in conventional production systems in order to achieve social acceptance (EC 2006; Kjærnes et al 2007; Deimel et al 2010; Miele et al 2013; Wissenschaftlicher Beirat Agrarpolitik BMEL 2015). As a result, some animal welfare programmes (AWPs) have emerged on the market. But, despite the promising signals from market research studies (eg Schulze et al 2008), products from these programmes are still very rare and, with few exceptions (eg Switzerland, the UK and The Netherlands), AWPs have not attained any great importance in the European meat market so far.

The long-term success of AWPs is determined by a variety of factors (eg consumer behaviour, acceptance of other stakeholders along the food supply chain) (Golan et al 2000; Harper & Henson 2001; Gulbrandsen 2006; Bracke 2007; Buller & Cesar 2007; Deimel et al 2010; Theuvsen 2011; Franz et al 2012). However, farmers are considered the most important stakeholder group for the successful implementation of enhanced FAW standards. In Germany and in many other European countries, only few farmers are bound by contract with the downstream production stages (except in the poultry sector). Therefore, it is difficult to implement new production or quality programmes if the majority of the farmers have doubts about the system with regard to such aspects as its long-term market success (Bahlmann & Spiller 2008; Deimel et al 2010; Franz et al 2012; Hansson & Lagerkvist 2012).

Even though many farmers in general have a positive attitude towards FAW, previous studies have shown that only a small number of farmers recognise the need for improvement in the level of animal welfare in livestock production systems (Deimel et al 2010; Vetouli et al 2012; Franz et al 2012). In general, producers look critically at AWPs because of the high economic risk associated with the adjustment of production systems. Farmers fear that the high investment costs for improved FAW will not pay off; as, for example, marketing by-products at higher prices is still highly prob-