

ANIMAL WELFARE ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR POULTRY, PIG AND CATTLE FARMERS VIA MOBILE APPLICATION

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Monitoring animal welfare is valuable for farmers to pinpoint points of attention. Having tools to self-assess the welfare status on farm would offer several advantageous, as self-scans are flexibly incorporable in routine farm management, are less threatening and are raising awareness about the benefits of closely inspecting the animals. Hence, a mobile application has been developed to allow farmers to assess the animal welfare of their livestock.

Similar to the Welfare Quality[®] and KTBL Protocol, the scan primarily covers animal-based 'outcome' measures (e.g. directly related to body condition, health, injuries, behaviour). Animal welfare indicators were carefully selected to make sure that the main welfare issues are addressed, and can be evaluated for a limited but illustrative number of animals in a fairly short time-span. The uptake by the sector will be restricted if the self-scans are too time-consuming and/or cumbersome. Additionally, key questions on farm management, housing and production parameters are included to allow for automated benchmarking with other, comparable farms.

Currently, self-scans are available for broilers, layers, sows and piglets, weaners, finishing pigs, beef cattle, lactating cows, dry cows and young stock. Within each animal category, separate tools are provided based on type of housing/milking system (e.g. free stall with/without cubicles or tie stall barns for dairy cattle; enriched cages, floor housing or aviary for layers; robotic milking system or milking installation with high or low milking pipeline for dairy farms). Farmers can assess different production groups at different time-slots. After online submission of a completed scan, a report is automatically generated calculating scores for each key welfare indicator. In addition, these scores are benchmarked anonymously with those of comparable farms. Moreover, farmers will be able to follow up the animal welfare status on their farm over time.

The main challenge was to develop tools which are both inviting and feasible for a farmer to include in his routine farm management without compromising the value of the data collected. Therefore, scans were tested by groups of farmers on multiple occasions.

By scanning and benchmarking animal welfare periodically, farmers will be encouraged to take action to address identified points of attention, and will be able to monitor effects of the measures taken over time. As the self-scans are carried out by farmers not trained/experienced in animal welfare evaluation, comparability of data between farms is expected to be less robust compared to welfare audits performed by trained auditors.