

### 3. Meeting of the sub-group on calves and dairy cows

Third meeting, 20 May 2022  
(Videoconference)

#### MINUTES

##### Attendance

<b>Independent expert</b>	Francesca Fusi
<b>Civil society organisations</b>	EDA Eurogroup Slow food
<b>Business and professional organisations</b>	Farm & Animal Health Copa Cogeca
<b>Member States</b>	Sweden The Netherlands Ireland Denmark
<b>European Commission</b>	DG SANTE – Colleagues from Unit G5, F2
<b>Guest</b>	Harry Blokhuis (EURCAW R&E)

## 1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed the participants to the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting

## 2. The Independent Expert, Francesca Fusi (Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale della Lombardia ed Emilia Romagna "B. Ubertini" IZSLER, Brescia) presented on 'Competence of stock people on dairy farms and calves fattening farms, training requirements'

### General training requirements

Directive 98/58/EC on the protection of farmed animals in its Annex rules "animals shall be cared for by a sufficient number of staff who possess the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence". The Directive 2008/118 on the minimum standards for the protection of calves confined for rearing and fattening does not contain specific prerequisites for competence or training requirements.

The Directives for pigs and poultry are more specific concerning training requirements. Both the Regulations on the protection of animals during killing and during transport define more explicitly the prerequisites for training of staff working with animals in the context of these activities.

The Italian training scheme for animal welfare for personnel covers:

- staff in slaughter plants,
- drivers and attendants of animal transport and
- staff on farms.

In Italy, the Ministry appointed the national reference centre (NRC) for animal welfare to assign trainers on a national, regional and local level to give free standardised trainings, including theoretical exams to obtain a 'certificate of attendance' and in addition practical exams for personnel of slaughter plants to obtain 'certificates of competence'.

### Specific requirements for staff on dairy farms and calf fattening farms

Since for staff working in dairy farms and calves fattening farms no prerequisites are defined by the EU legislation, the Italian Ministry of Health (with the support of the national reference centre for animal welfare) defined proof of "*appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence*".

In particular, Italian cattle farmers shall provide evidence of:

- as minimum standard: several years (suggested at least 10 years) of experience or school education (or further training) for the activities intended on the farm.
- For the standard 'best practice': either 10 years of experience and specific education.

### The Classyfarm system

Classyfarm is a new IT platform introduced by the Italian Ministry of Health and managed by IZSLER for the categorization of farms based on their level of

- animal welfare (animal-based and non-animal-based indicators)
- animal health (biosecurity), and
- consumption of veterinary medicines on farm ( supplied automatically by the Italian Electronic drug Prescriptions System)

It is based on 2 different checklists:

- a. designed for self-assessments for farmers and used by their veterinarians.
  - Several checklists have been developed in relation to different target populations identified (e.g. for ruminants: dairy cows in loose housing systems; dairy cows in tie-stall systems; veal calves; beef

cattle; dairy buffaloes; etc.). The results of the self-assessments are recorded in a central database (Classyfarm Platform) and evaluated for a risk assessment of farms.

- b. designed for official veterinarians, trained to apply these animal welfare checklists:

Assessing:

- good health,
- problems during calving,
- normal cattle behaviour,
- physiological movement,
- suitable environment and
- biological behaviour and nutrition

Checklists for official controls are fewer than those for self-assessments (e.g. among ruminants: adult cattle and buffaloes; bovine and buffalo calves). The results of the official controls are recorded in a central database of the Italian Ministry of Health. The two databases (for recording self-assessments and official controls) however are interconnected.

Animal based indicators. The checklists for self-assessment and for official controls contain animal based indicators (ABIs). The numbers of ABIs differ depending on the type of checklist and on the target animal population.

#### Outlook on suggestions to further develop the training scheme for stock people in the EU:

Introduction of a multi-stage training concept

- a. Training on a basic level for all animal handlers, a low level of experience and training are required;
- b. Training for an advanced level, for handlers involved in tasks of a higher risk for the animals such as
  - a. disbudding,
  - b. dehorning,
  - c. calving,
  - d. emergency killing on farm or
  - e. dealing with downer cows;

As these activities require a higher level of training and specific skills, a practical exam on farm in addition to the basic theoretical exams could be introduced.

Basic farming strategies involve e.g. grouping and feeding, understanding risks of facilities and equipment (drinkers, ventilation etc.) and the assessment of ABIs (lameness, skin lesions, cleanliness, body condition score, somatic cell count, human-animal relationship, mortality and morbidity rates), aligned with the principles of the Welfare Quality Project.

#### Introductions of Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs)

Standard operating procedures (SOPs) or written records and instructions on farm, are already being encouraged within the Classyfarm checklists. According to the expert, on large farms, involving a large number of handlers that frequently change, SOPs have the potential of increasing the standard of animal welfare, however only if they are specifically tailored for each farm. On the contrary, on small-scale farms, the advantage of SOPs is questionable. In Italy, cattle farms above 50 animals are categorised as large farms, under 50 animals as small-scale farms; they both fall under the official inspection scheme, with different control rates. The results of the Classyfarm checks (self assessment) feed into the official risk assessments for farms. Further improvement of the system will introduce the possibility that the results of self assessments could be compared with the results of the official controls to verify the quality of the self assessments.

### **3. Discussion on various aspects of the presentation**

- The subgroup was impressed by the presented integrated training and inspection system, that includes farmers, practical and official veterinarians and records data of both self-assessments and official controls for risk assessments of animal welfare on farms.
- The opinions on adequate threshold for large or small farms (50 – 150 dairy cows) differ greatly within the subgroup.
- The prerequisites for recognising competence in respect to experience and training differ considerably between the Member States, e.g.

- Mutilations, such as disbudding are handled diversely in the MS. In Italy e.g. farmers themselves have the right to disbud calves up to 3 weeks of age without anaesthesia or analgesia with caustic paste. In Denmark and other MS, only veterinarians are licensed to disbud and castrate calves under anaesthesia and analgesia.

**4. Eurogroup presents ‘ Cow signal happy farmers training scheme**

Cow signal is a private training scheme for farmers developed and traded in the Netherlands which consists of online and practical training modules. The training covers Animal Health and Animal Welfare and at the end of the course provides certificates.

**5. The Commission asks a question to the subgroup in context with introducing an animal welfare officer on large farms**

Which gain or problems does the subgroup see by introducing an animal welfare officer (AWO) on large farms? The main considerations expressed by members to this question can be summarised as follows:

- The members of the subgroup in general could not see advantages of an AWO on farm to improve the standard of animal welfare.
- Putting an AWO in place seems like a bureaucratic approach.
- Farmers could consider an AWO intrusive, putting their abilities at doubt.
- Are farmers not AWOs themselves?
- An AWO would unnecessarily increase the costs on farm
- The role of the AWO on farms would have to be clearly defined, his/her level of education tasks, whether they are on farm permanently or in regular intervals, can the veterinarian be the AWO etc. ?
- On large farms, farmers act as business operators and keepers as AWOs.
- It is not so much the question who, but rather how to make sure that people are trained and SOPs are in place, it is not a question of one person.
- Instead of an AWO checklists for self-assessment could help to improve the standard.

**6. Calendar for the next meetings**

**16 June 2022**, 14:30 – 17:30

Health Management for calves

**14 July 2022**, 9:00 – 12:00 (hybrid meeting)

Feeding management for suckling and fattening calves