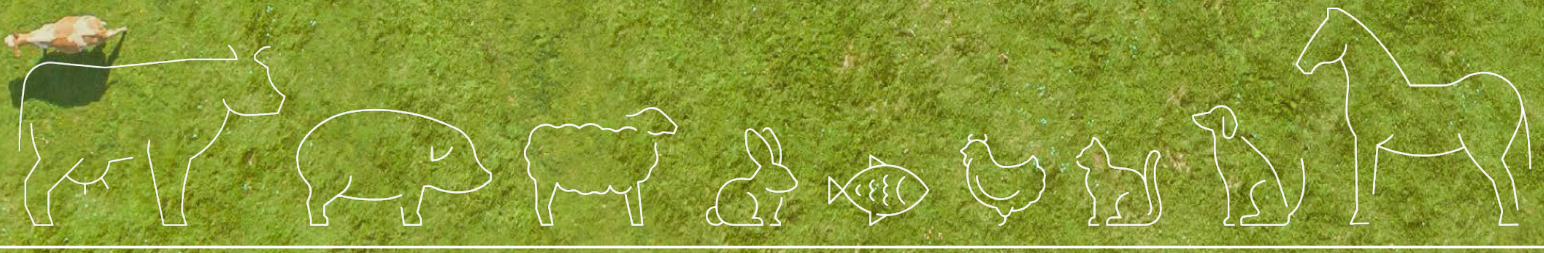
11th meeting of the EU Platform on animal welfare

Subgroup on the welfare of calves and dairy cows



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11th meeting of EU Platform, 1 July 2022

European Commission

Background

- Farm to Fork Strategy
- Revision of Directive 2008/119/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves
- Revision of Council Directive 98/58 on the protection for animals kept for farming purposes
- Proposal of species specific legislation for dairy cows

Background

- Based on the Policy Options of the IIA for farmed animals and additional relevant AW issues, the subgroup is examining issues in context with
- The improvement of ‘Duty of care’ for calves and dairy cows,
- Options of group housing calves from an early age in context with the ECI ‘end of cage age’
- Options of Increasing access to outdoor or to fresh air
- Options of Increasing space allowance
- Mutilations

The subgroup

- 10 members + Commission + guests
- 1 Independent expert Francesca Fusi
- Experts EURCAW ruminants and equines
- 3 Civil society organisations Slow food/Eurogroup for animals /EDA
- 2 Business and professional organisations Farm & Animal Health/Copa Cogeca
- 4 Member States Denmark /Netherlands / Sweden / Ireland
- 4 meetings since March
- 2 external experts were invited to present on specific topics

Topics for Meetings

- **Group housing** of calves
- **Competence** of stock people on dairy and calf fattening farms, training requirements
- **Calf health** management
- **Feeding** requirements for dairy and fattening calves
- **Mutilations**
- **Dairy cows: Housing systems**
- **Animal based indicators** to monitor and measure animal welfare on dairy and calf fattening farms
- **Standard operation procedures** (SOPs) on dairy farms
- **Dairy cows** health management
- **Breeding strategies**

I. Group housing of calves

Background:

- Current provisions require that calves are group housed latest from the age of 8 weeks
- In light of scientific evidence for biological behaviour of calves and the ‘End of cage age’ Initiative the subgroup explored issues related to group or pair housing calves at a younger age

Outlook:

- Commission is bound to phasing out individual housing for calves
- Update legislation in the light of scientific evidence; considering social and economic needs of the farming sector, trade and environmental aspects.

I. Group housing of calves

An external expert, from Danone, presented a pilot project on group housing of calves from the age of 2 weeks.

Conclusions

- animals more content
- weight gain was increased, calves bagan to eat solid feed sooner.
- improved health, reduced use of antimicrobials
- less workload for farmers and veterinarians
- decrease in vet costs by 10%
- in the long run the milk yield of early grouped calves is higher than that of individually housed calves

I. Group housing of calves

A subgroup expert presented critical issues for the success of group housing young calves:

- Good colostrum management
- Age gaps between calves not > 5 days.
- group housed calves should preferably be fed ‘ad libitum’
- Groups should be stable and consist of < 10 animals
- for the first 14 days calves should be fed minimum 3 meals per day minimum 2,5 litres per meal to satisfy sucking needs
- Roughage and water from first week onward
- Central feeding systems
- Outdoor housing protected from thermal stress
- sufficient space

development and the physical and mental wellbeing of calves are improved

Increase in biological behaviour

EFSA will provide recommendations for feeding requirements, minimum space and age of group housed calves and maximum group sizes

European Commission

I. Group housing of calves

The subgroup identified that farmers will require :

- A transition period
- Flexibility, especially small and medium size farms
- change of mindset (e.g. how to manage risk for respiratory infections due to immunological gap)
- Guidance by support bodies
- Training and guidelines

I. Impacts of group housing

For calves under defined circumstances

- Improved physical wellbeing
- Improved mental wellbeing
- Option to perform social behavior
- Improved robustness

For farmers

- more robust animals
- increased weight gains
- In the long run higher milk yield
- improved health
- less workload
- decrease in vet costs

II. Competence of stock people on dairy and calf fattening farms, training requirements

Background:

- To date, there are no specific legal requirements for training of staff on dairy or calf fattening farms
- Training was identified as one of the key tools to improve competence and raise the standard of AW.

The independent expert Francesca Fusi from Italy presented:

- The Italian training and inspection scheme ‘Classyfarm’, including trainings for farmers, veterinarians and official veterinarians, provided free of cost
- This IT platform was introduced by the Italian Ministry of Health and is managed by IZSLER

- One of the training goals is to enable farmers and veterinarians to perform self assessments on farm based on standardised checklists assessing ABIs

II. Competence of stock people on dairy and calf fattening farms, training requirements

The subgroup discussed the following options for trainings of farmers:

- Including veterinarians in the trainings was seen as a chance to improve AW
- Providing trainings for a basic as well as an advanced levels of competence depending on the responsibilities on farm (high risk e.g. calving, downer cows, colostrum management)
- Recognising competence based on years of experience
- Webinars/Online trainings based on modules as a useful and flexible means for farmers to attend trainings (e.g. ‘cow signal’ NL)

Impact of increase in competence

Animals
- Improved wellbeing
- Better human-animal relationship

Consumer
- Higher acceptance of farming and animal products

Farmers

- Increase in animal health lowering costs for treatments
- Better human-animal relationship
- Higher work satisfaction and motivation

III. Calf health management

Three experts of the subgroup jointly presented calf health management for dairy and fattening farms and identified the following critical areas:

- Birth management
- Colostrum and navel management
- Feeding management
- Health monitoring
- Biosecurity
- Training of staff

III. Calf health management

Example of good practice:

An external expert from NL presented the voluntary calf health system ‘kalf-ok’ developed to improve the quality of young stock rearing. Principles:

- assessment and scoring of specific ‘**rearing indicators**’ (e.g. mortality rate and the use of antimicrobials)
- farmers regularly receive herd specific information on their **calf survival rate** on farm
- Farmers with a high quality of calf rearing **are rewarded**
- The system is financed by the calf industry.
- Rate of participation (90-95%).

- The Mortality rate on farms participating in the scheme has been reduced considerably since its introduction in 2017

III.Calve health management

To improve calf health the subgroup proposes options to

- Increase farmers' awareness of their calf health situation
- Identify and monitoring calf health, e.g. mortality and morbidity rate, use of antimicrobials
- assess data collected on farm on a regular basis
- monitor the health of calves at least twice a day according to a defined protocol
- Follow a mandatory health plan or written instructions developed with the veterinarian and staff on farm (participatory approach)
- provide trainings to farmers for specific areas of high risk (e.g. management of colostrum and feeding, management of hygiene),
- develop guidelines for these areas

III.Calve health management

Impact of the improvement of calf health management:

For animals → lower rate of morbidity and mortality, improved welfare

For farmers → lower costs for treatments and losses, less use of antimicrobials, increase in work satisfaction, higher revenue

Impact for consumers → higher acceptance of animal products