

# 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EU Platform on animal welfare

Subgroup on Calves and dairy cows

Overview of the work done



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# The subgroup



**4 meetings** since December

**7 external experts** invited to present on specific topics

## Topics presented:

- 9<sup>th</sup> meeting : Animal welfare indicators
- 10<sup>th</sup> meeting: Health Management of dairy COWS
- 11<sup>th</sup> meeting
  - Cattle breeding
  - Feeding management of fattening calves and welfare
  - Cow Calf Contact systems
- 12<sup>th</sup> meeting: EFSA recommendations vs. subgroup considerations



# Animal welfare indicators

- Big differences in the **interaction** animal-environment/housing system and management: **ABIs** are then useful.
  - At slaughterhouse : alerts about farmers with recurrent issues
  - At farm: get information and monitor improvement
- Assessing ABIs might be
  - time consuming
  - expensive
- **Thresholds** on animal-based indicators should be based on **“robust” data** and should be **regularly reviewed**.
- A **combination of both resource and animal base indicators** could be appropriate
  - secure a **minimum level** of animal welfare in all cases
  - make **easy to enforce** and to **comply** with
  - facilitate obtaining **financial support**
- Avoid increased **administrative burden** on farmers and authorities
- **Iceberg indicators**: There is no reason to analyze many different indicators when we can observe only a few:
  - Body condition score
  - Cleanliness score
  - Lameness score
  - Mortality
- consensus on the need of a **different approach** for large and small farms (e.g., 5% is not the same situation)
- need to **promote positive indicators** in addition to indicators of negative impacts on welfare
- Need to **train** assessors and controllers
- **New technologies** could help on measuring this performance ABIs (e.g., body scan)

# Health management of dairy cows (annual visits)

- Animal **health visits**,
  - most of the MS
  - non mandatory in all countries
  - performed by private practitioners
  - many restricted to specific animals or aspects.
- 70% of countries which performed cattle health visits already cover **welfare aspects**.
- Possible candidate requirements that could be included in the EU legislation:
  - **mandatory** veterinary animal **welfare visits** with a risk-based frequency,
  - the **obligation of intervening** when above a certain threshold for certain indicators (e.g., lameness)
  - having **national reduction targets**.



# Health management of dairy cows (welfare plans)



AW plan must **be specific** for each farm.



AW legislation for all animals  
**same requirements** for all farms independently of the size.



**Avoid** a disproportionate **administrative burden** in detriment of animals  
**Simplified procedures** for smaller farms (e.g., food systems).



**Regularly review**  
- annual frequency for big farms  
- when something happens for small farms.



**Avoid mixing roles** and responsibilities:  
- the veterinarian of the farm must document the situation in the farm  
- documents are checked by the official inspector.



**Who** should perform the AW visit  
- veterinarians of the farm  
- private companies  
- other

# Breeding

- **Difficult** to use breeding data to **measure animal welfare**
  - **Variation between animals** (breeders work with entire populations), sometimes due to management and choices at farm level
  - **Data** from breeding companies **not available** to CAs or vice versa
- Question : **Legislating on a single trait** – could lead to unbalanced breeding ?
- Discussion **unconclusive**



# Feeding management of calves (veal)

- Current **veal feeding schemes** (similar to calves' preference)
  - **Roughage** is provided **ad libitum** (mainly straw) but **play with the quantity of milk replacers** given, as calves prefer milk.
  - **Iron shots** – **1 or 2 weeks** after arrival to the veal unit (painful and stressful)
  - **60-80%** of calves are concerned by a **lack of iron at 2 weeks**
- Iron should be corrected **through diet** (roughage high in iron – i.e., hay)
- **Fiber (straw or hay)** – high positive effect on rumination and tongue play and oral manipulation.
- **Cross-sucking** behaviour is a problem in veal units at a very young age (buckets vs. teats)





# CCC (Cow-calf contact)

- **Increasing interest** among consumers and dairy farmers (EU, US, Brazil,...)
- **Situations are very different** among Member states (MS)
- **High variability** on how CCC is performed (duration of the suckling period, etc.).
- Challenge for farmers: **less saleable milk** (dairy)
- **Foster cow** - good improvement
- **Untethered period** in tie-stalls around calving
- **Big change** in mentality

## Benefits of cow-calf contact

- **Calf**
  - increase with the **duration** of contact
  - allow **sucking** behaviour
  - no cross-sucking
  - **social competence**
  - **weight gain**
- **Cow**
  - Potential **health benefits** (e.g., less retained placenta)
  - benefits of performing **maternal behaviour**

## Issues

- **Separation stress**
  - bond increases linearly until **4 days**
  - **24h** vs. **2-3 days** of CCC (dairy)
- Increased risk of **transmission of infectious agents** (hygiene conditions more important)





# Subgroup considerations on the EFSA Recommendations Calves

## Feeding

- **20% of body weight**
  - **Faisable**
  - More precise requirement in legislation (e.g., a **range of quantity**) useful for enforcement
- Important to ensure **quality** of milk and milk replacers
- Important to clarify the provision on the **number of meals/day** in legislation
- **Teats** in veal production to avoid cross sucking

## Group housing

- **Pairs** – as a 1st step - easy to implement (just need to remove the wall)
- **Pen mats** - issue in small farms
- **Space allowance**
  - **3 m<sup>2</sup>/calf** :
    - faisable (already widely implemented for dairy),
    - challenging
      - in some MS (e.g., IE)
      - veal production (strictly implement the current legislation)
  - **Higher** space allowance - difficult
- Need change on strategy and mentality, but considered faisable



## Subgroup considerations on the EFSA Recommendations Dairy cows

- **Tethering**

- Important to stop the practice where tethering is not needed
- In other cases : important to have **transition periods, support farms**, etc.

- **Space allowance**

- **9 m<sup>2</sup>/cow indoor** (optimum area for **cubicle systems**, includes 1 cubicle/cow)
- Include **outdoor functional areas** in the 9m<sup>2</sup>/cow (e.g., **feeding**) **could be justified**
- **Open bedded systems** – more space allowance needed
- **Small farms:** enough **transition periods**

# General considerations

- Requirements in **legislation**
  - Help to **improve the situation** (better than guidelines, etc).
  - **Help access to funding** (because compulsory)
- Important to have an impact assessment and adequate **transition periods**.
- **Avoid overregulating**
- **Avoid being too restrictive** in certain provisions (e.g., content of welfare plan, specific monitoring methods/tools, etc.)

# THANK YOU

