

THE ASSESSMENT OF INSPECTION OF CATTLE WELFARE

Oľga Ondrasovicová, Milada Vargová, Miloslav Ondrasovic, Nad'a Sasáková, Kornélia Culenová, Andrea Kasková, Simona Smirjáková

University of Veterinary medicine, Komenského 73, 041 81 Kosice, the Slovak Republic

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Introduction

The issues of suitable conditions for animals and their rearing were set by legislation already in the past. Recently, EU member states adopted a range of new legislative standards oriented on increased protection of animal herds and the environment. The concept of animal welfare is extensive and includes physiological and psychical harmony of animals (Novák et al., 1999). Because of that any effort at evaluation of welfare must consider the fact that animal sensations derive from their structure and behavioural functions. Because of that we face to the challenge to select suitable indicators or parameters that could serve as a measure of evaluation of subjective ideas. According to BROOM (1986) welfare is a state of an individual as regards its attempts to cope with the environment in which it finds itself. FRASER (1990) defines welfare as a structured complex discipline immediately related to veterinary medicine, experimental scientific investigations, animal rearing and applied ethology.

Ensuring optimum conditions in animal herds and complete attendance and care are the basic presumptions of complying with welfare principles described above.

Material and methods

The study investigated application of acts and regulations that set the rules for ensuring animal well-being with regard to their physiological, ethological and productive requirements summarised in the Supplement No. 3 of the governmental Decree No. 322/2003 of the Civil Code and Act. No. 488 of the civil code on veterinary care.

Evaluations were carried out on selected cattle farms. Results of 3-year investigations were summarised including relevant inspections and official reports and our own observations.

The health state of animals, productive parameters and handling of animals were evaluated on the basis of data entered in the book of records.

Results and discussion

Results of assessment of the animal protection programme for the period of 3 years

According to § 5 of the government Decree of SR No. 322/2003 of the Civil Code, relevant bodies are responsible for inspection of animal herds according to the rules specified by this Decree. To meet this condition, animal protection programme applied in the period of 3 years in cattle herds was assessed. In this period 93 inspections were performed on selected cattle farms. The parameters evaluated and the results obtained are summarised in Table 1.

According to Table 1, 93 cattle farms were inspected during the investigation period on which rearing conditions of 16 753 cattle were evaluated. Inspection showed that the way of housing of 97.7% cattle met the legislation requirements and 2.3% was housed under unsuitable conditions. The principal shortcomings included out-of-date houses and bad hygiene. Other parameters evaluated on the farms met the requirements. During the period investigated one corrective measure was ordered which should have eliminated the shortcomings observed.

Tab. 1 Evaluation of animal protection programme

Parameters	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year
Number of farms	38	45	10
Number of animals	9 388	5 745	1620
Way of housing			
Suitable	98.7 %	100 %	99 %
Unsuitable	1.3 %	0	1.0%
Out-of-date facilities	1.3 %	0	0
Insufficient hygiene	0	0	1%
Limited movement of animals	0	0	0
Negative effects	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Tending and care level			
Suitable	100 %	100 %	100 %
Nutrition, feeding and watering technology			
Suitable	100 %	100 %	100%

The level of tending to animals, nutrition, technology of feeding and watering and handling of animals were acceptable. During the period investigated one corrective measure was ordered to meet the legislation requirements.

Table 1 shows that this type of evaluation is informative and provides picture about situation in cattle herds but fails to address to all question of welfare level. Because of that 3 more detailed analyses were carried out on 3 reconstructed cattle farms.

Assessment of observation of welfare requirements on selected farms

Results of selected parameters evaluated on 3 farms over 3-year period are summarised in Table 2.

Tab. 2 Comparison of the results obtained on dairy farms with different way of farming (3-year study)

Parameter	Farm 1	Farm 2	Farm 3
Number of cows	400	150	130
Average milk yield	4500	4200	3500
% of died cows	1-1.5	8.0 – 8.7	3.3
% of abortions	1.25	1.8-2.9	2.0
Number of newborn calves	620	140	100
% of died calves	4.5-5.7	6.2-8.6	11.2-12.0
Gastroenteritis	55	61.7	70.2
Bronchopneumonia	38.0	35.3	27.0
Unknown	7	3.0	2.8

Table 2 shows that the level of care on selected reconstructed farms with free resting boxes differed. The milk yield corresponded to cows reared in submontane regions. The highest mortality of cows was recorded on Farm 2. Despite good care of calves on Farm 1 the number of dead calves ranged between 4.5 and 5.7 %. The highest mortality rate of calves was recorded on Farm 3. The most frequent causes of calf mortality on all three farms were gastroenteritis and bronchopneumonia.

The issues of ensuring good conditions for animals during their rearing are a long-term discussed theme. The objective of legislation on animal protection is to ensure all 5 animal freedoms (FAWC) for farmed animals. An ideal system of animal rearing should comply with the requirements on active management of health, allow the animal to express normal behaviour and ensure high level of attendance and care (PARA et al., 2003).

Conclusion

Slovak legislation on all areas of animal protection, as included in the Act on veterinary care, complies with the knowledge of modern science and principles of EU law. Despite that practical observation of legislative requirements is not without faults. One should consider the relationship between economic situation of individual subjects and meeting the required parameters. Our observations reflect the real situation on selected agricultural farms oriented on rearing of cattle, particularly dairy cows and calves.

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