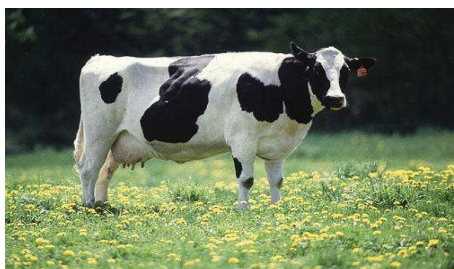


Project number: 4854

Date: June 2009

Funding source: EU FP6: Priority 5: Food Quality & Safety

Project dates: May 2004 – Apr 2009



Key external stakeholders: Farmers, Farmer Associations, Animal Breeding Organisations, Retailers, Consumers, Veterinarians, European and National Politicians, Policymakers

Practical implications for stakeholders: Animal welfare is of considerable importance to European consumers. Nowadays food quality is not only determined by the overall nature and safety of the end product but also by the perceived welfare status of the animals from which the food is produced. Improving the animal's welfare can positively affect pathology and disease resistance and also has a direct bearing on food quality and safety. This research project was designed to develop European standards for on-farm welfare assessment and product information systems as well practical strategies for improving animal welfare.

Standards for on-farm welfare assessment and information systems should be based upon consumer demands, the marketing requirements of retailers and stringent scientific validation. Teagasc research provided information on consumer demands. The wider project provided results that were translated into reliable on-farm systems for monitoring the welfare status of cattle, pigs and poultry and developed practical improvement strategies that provide producers with the opportunity to enhance the welfare status of their stock. Information from the broader project is available from <http://www.welfarequality.net/everyone>.

Main results: Teagasc was part of a group of social scientists which examined existing knowledge on consumer beliefs, concerns, expectations, and use of information on animal friendliness, with particular emphasis on product labeling across six European countries (Great Britain, Italy, Hungary, Norway, Sweden and The Netherlands). This work was based on 48 focus group discussions that were undertaken by the research teams. It highlighted that consumers were generally concerned about, and knowledgeable of, the connection between animal welfare and food quality; that they make distinctions between "factory farms" (low animal welfare) and alternative systems such as organic, traditional, free-range, small scale (high animal welfare); and that they require a clear, standardized logo verified by a competent independent authority to communicate animal welfare standards. Price, lack of trust in the claim made on labels; convenience and limited availability of welfare-friendly goods were barriers to purchase of animal welfare friendly foods.

Opportunity / Benefit: The project provides standardised welfare measures that can be converted into accessible and understandable information to allow clear marketing and profiling of products.

Collaborating Institutions: National Institute for Consumer Research Norway; University of Cardiff, Wales; University of Pisa, Italy; Wageningen University and Research Centre, The Netherlands; University of Stockholm, Sweden; University of Toulouse, France; University of Reading, UK; Teagasc, Ireland

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1. Project background: This study is part of the Welfare Quality® research project which has been co-financed by the European Commission, within the 6th Framework Programme, contract No. FOOD-CT-2004-506508. Welfare Quality is about integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain: from public concern to improved welfare and transparent quality. This project aims to accommodate societal concerns and market demands, to develop reliable on-farm monitoring systems, product information systems, and practical species-specific strategies to improve animal welfare. Forty institutes and universities (representing thirteen European countries) with specialist expertise participated in this project.

2. Questions addressed by the project:

- What are consumer concerns about food animal welfare?
- What type of information is demanded by consumers?
- Develop effective communication and information strategies.
- How can consumer barriers to purchasing welfare friendly products be overcome?
- Improve the understanding of consumers' expectations concerning information on animal welfare in various countries and on food distribution systems.

3. The experimental studies:

A qualitative research approach was used. Forty-eight focus groups were conducted using an experienced moderator. 349 different participants from seven European study countries: France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK were recruited. The criteria used to select participants across countries included; urban mothers, rural women; married or living with a partners but no children living at home (empty nesters); seniors; young singles; 'politically active'/vegetarian.

Individual research teams were also able to select a seventh country-specific group that consisted of consumer-citizens who were of particular interest within their study country (UK-'Young singles north', Netherlands-no extra group, France-'Ethnic minorities', Sweden-'Politically active fathers', Norway- 'Hunters', Italy-'Gourmets', Hungary-'Health conscious').

In order to ensure best practice and to standardise approaches across the different study countries a detailed focus group protocol was produced, which provided national research teams with a range of practical information and suggestions about how to undertake the focus group research. The protocol included details regarding focus group techniques, the roles of the facilitators, how the focus groups should be transcribed, etc. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were imported into NVivo and analysed.

4. Main results:

- Consumers were concerned about the welfare of farm animals and were knowledgeable about the connection between animal welfare and food quality. However, consumers were less knowledgeable about more technical welfare issues such as animal diseases and animal behaviour and some of the complexities that might influence the link between high animal welfare and high food quality.
- Consumers made distinctions between 'factory farms', which they perceived as having low levels of animal welfare, and alternative systems (such as organic, free-range, traditional, small scale) which were perceived to offer higher levels of welfare.
- Consumers expressed a number of preferences regarding form and content of product information and labeling about farm animal welfare. They required a logo that would be clearly legible and any unfamiliar terms should be clearly explained using in-store information, leaflets and websites. The

label should be trustworthy and certified, monitored and enforced by a reliable body. Labeling should be standardised across different retail formats. Consumers expressed a desire to receive specific information regarding; the origin and traceability of the product; the nature of the feed given to animals and whether the animal had been given GM feeds or antibiotics; how the animals were treated; whether the animals had access to the outdoors; the distance the live animal had to travel.

- Consumers believed that welfare-friendly products were healthier, were of a higher quality and tasted better than lower welfare products. They also believed that welfare-friendly animals received fewer routine medicines such as antibiotics.
- Consumers identified a range of negative attributes and barriers that might prevent them from purchasing animal welfare friendly foods, these included; price and lack of trust in the claim made on labels; convenience; limited availability of welfare-friendly goods.
- Consumers acknowledged the priority and relevance of addressing issues of animal suffering before addressing issues concerning positive aspects of animals' quality of life (e.g. freedom to move, social contact, sexual reproduction). Consumers, and in particular Dutch consumers, expressed concern that issues of animal suffering still need to be addressed, as they believed that animal suffering should no longer exist in a 'civilised' Europe and that a new standard for animal welfare should deal with the positive aspects of animals' lives.

4. Opportunity/Benefit:

The provision of standardised welfare measures that can be converted into accessible and understandable information allows clear marketing and profiling of products.

Involvement in this project is enabling Teagasc to make a major contribution to the development of consumer based pan-European standards for on-farm welfare assessment and product information systems as well as practical strategies for improving animal welfare. Implementation of such a system will have a major impact on the marketing of beef, milk, poultry and pigmeat throughout the EU.

6. Dissemination: www.welfarequality.net

Main publications:

McIntyre, B. and Cowan, C. 2005. Welfare quality, consumer concerns: Hungary, focus groups, Report for EU Commission

Cowan, C. 2005. Welfare Quality, presentation to Irish Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council, November.

7. Compiled by: Bridin McIntyre