

Rural Policy Centre



Consultation on the link between the health and
wellbeing of farm personnel and farm animal
welfare

SRUC, 21 March 2014
Consultation Response



CONSULTATION ON THE LINK BETWEEN THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF FARM PERSONNEL AND FARM ANIMAL WELFARE

Introduction

SRUC (Scotland's Rural College) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the link between health and well-being of farm personnel and farm animal welfare¹.

SRUC is an innovative, knowledge-based organisation that supports the rural sector through research, education and expert consultancy services. SRUC wishes to see, and contribute significantly to delivering, a sustainable agricultural and rural land use sector in Scotland. SRUC staff work in a broad range of areas (for more information see www.sruc.ac.uk) and our responses to the questions below reflect this broad expertise, but draw on specific research projects where appropriate.

Several SRUC staff have contributed to this submission¹ which has been co-ordinated by Dr Cath Milne, Professor Cathy Dwyer and SRUC's [Rural Policy Centre](#).

¹ Staff from SRUC's Animal and Veterinary Sciences Research Group particularly those in the Animal Behaviour and Welfare Team, the Future Farming Systems Group and the Rural Policy Centre.

The views given in this document are the collective views of animal welfare natural and social scientists working within SRUC but should not be taken as the views of SRUC.

Question 1. Do you believe there is a link between the health and well-being of farmers and the welfare of the farm animals for which they are responsible?

Yes: The majority of contributors to this consultation in SRUC believe there is a link.

Question 2. Do you have any information that is relevant to this topic? This might include case studies, your own experience, numerical data or other sources of relevance. Please provide details.

Both physical and mental well-being linkages exist.

- Zoonotic diseases that compromise health and well-being can be transmitted from/to farm personnel/animals.
- The physical demands of livestock management, particularly in extensive systems, means that animals cared for by farm personnel whose physical health and well-being is compromised in any way, dependent on circumstances, can be less than might otherwise be the case.
- Psychologically motivated personnel with positive attitudes to farm livestock are associated with higher levels of welfare for animals in their care. Their observational alertness and willingness to act, in this case to ensure animals have a high quality of life, are greater. Motivated personnel take pride in having healthy, happy and productive animals. Difficult working environments (weather conditions or poor building/facilities design) can demotivate, particularly when personnel have no control over it and are unable to act to improve their situation. This has been observed by many staff and is supported in the literature for example:
 - Ellingsen, K., Coleman, G. J., Lund, V., & Mejdell, C. M. (2014).. Using Qualitative Behaviour Assessment to explore the link between stockperson behaviour and dairy calf behaviour. Applied Animal Behaviour Science In Press, available online 28 January 2014.
 - Hemsworth P H and Coleman G J (1998). Human-Livestock Interactions: The Stockperson and the Productivity and Welfare of Intensively Farmed Animals pp 158. CAB International: Wallingford, UK
 - Hemsworth P H (2003). Human-animal interactions in livestock production. Applied Animal Behaviour Science 81, 185-198
 - Lensink B J, Boivin X, Pradel P, Le Neindre P and Veissier I (2000). Reducing veal calves' reactivity to people by providing additional human contact. Journal of Animal Science 78, 1213-1218
 - Lensink B J, Veissier I and Florand L (2001). The farmers' influence on calves' behaviour, health and production of a veal unit. Animal Science 72, 105-116

- McCrindle, C M E (1998). The community development approach to animal welfare: an African perspective. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 59, 227-233.
- Ryan R M and Deci E L (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist* 55, 68-78
- Seabrook M F (2001). The effect of the operational environment and operating protocols on the attitudes and behaviour of employed stockpersons. In: Hovi M and Bouilhol M (eds) *Proceedings of the 3rd NAHWOA Workshop, Human-Animal Relationship: Stockmanship and Housing in Organic Livestock Systems* pp 21-30. October 21-24 2000, Clermont-Ferrand, France. University of Reading: UK
- Seabrook M F and Bartle N C (1992). Environmental factors influencing the production and welfare of farm animals - human factors. In: Phillips C J C and Piggins D (eds) *Farm Animals and the Environment* pp 111-130. CAB International: Wallingford, UK
- The clinical and behavioural signs exhibited by animals that are physically or mentally suffering are clearly observable by competent personnel. Concern for their well-being affects empathetic personnel and where problems are chronic and particularly when they are insolvable they can demoralise, demotivate and mentally distress good farm personnel.
- A complex example, as it was caused by breaches in ethical standards at least as much if not more than welfare standards, is the compulsory culling of livestock in Foot and Mouth disease outbreaks, such as that experienced in Britain in 2001. The mental well-being effects on affected farms have been clearly reported, particularly in cases where very young animals were culled and/or the culling process was not perceived by farm personnel to be humane.

Question 3. What are the most important factors concerning the link between the health and well-being of farmers and the welfare of their livestock?

The most important factors can vary with situation and is an area that has not been widely studied. Factors we can identify are summarised below but there are likely to be others:

- Level of motivation in farm personnel
 - Job satisfaction
 - Attitudes to/pride in farming and animals
 - Self determination
 - Perceived respect/value place on good welfare in society and by employer (if employed) and/or peers.
- Physical ability of farm personnel– related to factors such as age, physical and mental health
- Empathy of farm personnel
- Ability of farm personnel to read animal behaviour and other indicators of well-being
- Farm personnel knowledge of good animal welfare

- Physical environment – level of welfare challenge to both animal and farm personnel
- Well being of farm animals – chronic problems can feedback into poorer motivation of farm personnel as expanded above.

Question 4. What factors can positively influence both the health and well-being of farmers and the welfare of their livestock?

Removal of factors that negatively influence both the health and well-being of farmers and the welfare of their livestock can have positive effects. For example,

- Improved environments and health can positively influence both farmer and animal welfare.
- Greater knowledge of good welfare through increasing the ability of farmers to manage livestock well can positively affect their pride in their work and motivation, which will feed back to the animals during interactions with the farmer as well as in general standards of care.
- Few stories get reported on how well farmers care for their stock – the impression created by only negative stories is one of being ‘under siege’ which psychological studies has shown to have negative impacts on motivation and attitudes.

Increasing the degree of self-determination (empowering) farm personnel can also positively influence both human and animal health and well-being. Farm personnel can often find solutions to difficult problems if given the necessary power and resources, which generates feelings of pride and self-worth that feed back to animal welfare benefits beyond those solved because of a more positive attitude. It also encourages farm personnel to further innovate to solve other animal health and well-being challenges – forming an upward spiral. Linked to the above (empowerment), a greater inclusion of farm personnel in actively finding solutions to animal welfare challenges on their farms (and encouragement to be more involved). Many of the difficult animal welfare challenges on farm are due to unique combinations of factors – and so require unique solutions.

Farm personnel being valued for their standards of animal care can promote positive attitudes and motivate them to make further efforts. Consumers and retailers could also provide greater rewards for high standards of animal health and well-being – both financial and other forms of ‘appreciation’. This would help to create a culture where caring for animals, and food production, is valued by society.

Question 5. Do you know of any current mechanisms to identify and support farmers with regard to their health and well-being, including their relationship with the welfare of their livestock? How well do you consider these mechanisms work?

We could only identify a few mechanisms. The Health and Safety Executive provide support to farmers on their health and well-being in relationship with welfare of their livestock with regards to zoonotic infections and less directly with regards to managing animals in ways that will reduce the risk of physical injury. The work of Temple Grandin and others on design of handling facilities, which has health and well-being benefits for both animals and farm personnel, has been presented at a number of knowledge exchange events, including demonstrations at shows. Farmer discussion groups including groupings such as the Danish ‘farmer stable’ system for dairy farmers are a further example we recognise as providing some support. The knowledge exchanged in discussion groups can improve animal health and well-being and it also has a positive mental well-being effect on participating farmers –

again there is a further feedback loop to animal well-being through improvement in farmer motivation and attitudes.

With respect to how well these mechanisms work, we are not aware of any evidence that quantifies how well they work though there is some anecdotal evidence that they do have positive effects. The mental well-being of farmers is rarely considered or directly addressed so effects on it are not currently reviewed either.

Question 6. Are there any changes to current mechanisms or organisational arrangements that you would like to see, that you believe would better identify problems and support farmers?

SRUC staff highlighted the following points:

- Recognition in society of the work farmers do and the importance of rural communities (giving them value in society) could improve the feeling of self-worth in farm personnel and pride in their work.
- Recognition in society of the psychological human health and well-being effects of coping with animal health and well-being challenges.
- Perhaps self-esteem or resilience could be part of education in agricultural colleges, as it is starting to be promoted in schools. Farmers are often remote and lone workers so opportunities to talk to others are often in short supply but could be developed.