

ANIMAL WELFARE ASSESMENT ON HEALTH CARE VISITS AT CATTLE FARMS

Objectives

Animal welfare in Finnish cattle production has become a more and more important issue. Animal protection law does not guarantee animal welfare. The consumer demands of animal welfare in production animals have increased. The dairy and beef industry needs a tool for collecting data from the farm level to answer these challenges. The industry has set criteria for responsible production, which includes indicators for animal welfare. Animal welfare and responsibility of the production are assessed during cattle health care visits and the data is stored and processed in the centralized health care register for Finnish cattle herds called NASEVA.

Materials and Methods

NASEVA is a special unit of The Association for Animal Disease Prevention (ETT), and it was founded in 2006. All remarkable slaughterhouse and dairy companies are members in the ETT. NASEVA-register was built for development and follow-up of the national health care scheme for dairy and beef farms. The register contains data concerning management plan, health status, production data and medical treatments of the animals on a farm. The health service veterinarian visits the farm at least once a year.

From 2012 animal welfare and the responsibility of the production are included in the health care visits. The animal welfare assessment is based on the Welfare Quality[®]-protocol, where evaluation is made mostly by observing the behaviour and condition of the animals, not with exact measurement of the production environment. The management and production data of the farm is collected, and cow and calf mortality, calf production per cow, average milk production, daily weight gain and grazing are used as indicators for the responsibility of the production.

Results and discussion

The criteria for responsible production can be used to target special advisory activities to the farms that do not fulfill the limit values. For animal welfare and the image of the whole dairy and beef production, the purpose of this system is to help farms to improve their production conditions.

Conclusions

NASEVA is a tool for dairy and beef industry for documentation of the farm-based quality in the production chain. The demands of the consumers for animal welfare and responsible production data can partly be fulfilled with this documentation.