

Implementation of animal-based measures within an animal-welfare labelling scheme for steers

Sabine Hartmann¹, Verena Wesian¹, Christoph Winckler², Christine Berger², Marlene Berger², Edina Scherzer² and Christine Leeb²

¹VIER PFOTEN-Stiftung für Tierschutz, Science Unit, Austria, ²University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Department of Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Austria; sabine.hartmann@four-paws.org

Animal-based measures (ABM) are used to indicate animal welfare (AW) and reflect the outcome of resources. ABM have been implemented in Austria for the first time within the AW label ‘Tierschutz-kontrolliert’ applied to ‘ALMO®’ steers kept in loose housing systems with pasture access. The goal of this on-farm study was to describe the implementation of ABM during auditing, to evaluate the prevalence of ABM and potential correlations with resource-based measures (RBM). Four inspectors trained to sufficient agreement in assessing 15 selected ABM, audited 190 farms regarding both RBM and ABM. For this study 120 audits (1,784 steers) were analysed. The median prevalence (%) of each ABM was 0.0. The most common parameters found were: ‘dirtiness’ (Q3: 15.0%; Max: 64.2%), ‘ocular discharge’ (Q3: 4.7%; Max: 35.7%) and ‘loose faeces’ (Q3: 2.8%; Max: 50.0%). Additionally, on several farms the following parameters had highest maximum values: ‘hairless spots on front leg’ (Q3: 0.0%; Max: 40.0%), ‘overgrown claws’ (Q3: 0.0%; Max: 33.3%) and ‘hairless spots on head, neck, shoulder or back’ (Q3: 0.0%; Max: 31.3%). ‘Hairless spots on front legs’ were significantly higher in cubicles with rubber mats (Q3: 2.63%; Max: 40%; n=24), than in straw systems, where they were never observed (deep litter: P=0.004; n=31; straw flow system: P=0.015; n=21). Space allowance correlated negatively with ‘dirtiness’ (-0.356; P=0.007) as well as ‘hairless spots on the hind leg’ (-0.349; P=0.008). The negative correlation found between certain RBM and ABM suggests the need to address and ultimately adjust those RBM (e.g. replacing rubber mat systems with straw systems). Furthermore, the fact that some ABM do not correlate with RBM but nevertheless vary between similar housing systems, reiterates the necessity to include ABM in any auditing for quality seals.