

Dairy cattle welfare assessment in Israel*Gilad Faktor**Hachaklait Veterinary services Israel, Israel; faktor@hachaklait.co.il*

The objective of this presentation is to introduce a new audit for assessing dairy cattle welfare in Israel. The audit was created on the basis of the European Welfare Quality assessment protocol for cattle, the Bristol Welfare Assurance Programme (BWAP) and the American Dairy welfare evaluation guide. As these protocols are not totally suitable for Israeli Dairy farms, we created an Israeli tailored audit. Promoting animal welfare is one of chief duties of veterinarians. 'Hachaklait', a group practice of 46 bovine practitioners in Israel attends approximately 90% of dairy farms in Israel (some 100,000 milking cows). Therefore we developed an advisory welfare audit for our clients. The special conditions in our dairy farms and our hot and humid climate require unique welfare issues to be examined. For example, lameness is a minor issue in Israel (around 6% annual occurrence) as our farms are comprised of open pens with soft matter and cows spend little time on concrete floors (compared to high rates of lameness in stall systems due to excessive walking and standing on concrete floors). On the other hand, cooling the cows on farm (water sprinklers and ventilation) is a big welfare issue. Our audit is based on our herd health department data (resource based) and on animal based data from farm visit. As most of our farms are highly computerized we have a large data base on many topics (morbidity, mortality, fertility milk yield, body condition score, lameness and more). On the basis of this data we are able to pinpoint potential welfare issues prior to farm visit. The audit is comprised of five topics: husbandry and living conditions, animal health, painful procedures, human-animal relationship (including animal behaviour) and summary. Each topic is evaluated numerically, for example, when evaluating ventilation we will give the following scores: no ventilation=2, partial ventilation=1, full ventilation=0. When summarising, a total score is presented for both resource and animal based data. As we have only started using this audit, we only have preliminary results. After auditing a large number of farms we will create welfare benchmarks. These benchmarks will be presented to our clients as welfare issues that don't meet the standard and require improvement.