

Evaluating 'Animal Welfare Payments' of the EUs Common Agricultural Policy

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In the EUs Common Agricultural Policy, one measure is specifically targeted at supporting farm animal welfare: the 'Animal Welfare Payments'. Farms participating in this voluntary measure commit themselves to requirements such as access to pasture or the provision of straw bedding. We evaluated if the measure achieves its goal of supporting farms with a 'good' animal welfare status. To this aim we implemented the Welfare Quality® protocols, a resource-oriented assessment tool and a set of 10 health indicators. The data collection was carried out in 2013/2014 on a sample of 112 dairy farms participating in the support measure in Germany. The data were primarily analysed using descriptive statistics. To identify relationships between particular indicators and indicator systems, correlation coefficients (Spearman) were calculated. Differences between farming systems and sub-measures were analysed by means of non-parametric tests. The Welfare Quality® assessment showed a good situation with respect to the principles of 'good housing' (Ø 66.7 | 37.0-100) and 'appropriate behaviour' (Ø 57.7 | 17.0-90.8) and neutral values for 'good feeding' (Ø 49.0 | 4.2-100) and 'good health' (Ø 49.3 | 30.0-78.8). The resource-oriented assessment confirms problems with access to water and points out other critical aspects such as poor conditions for calving and resting. The health indicator analysis showed relevant prevalence of lameness (Ø 15% | 0-69) and mastitis (Ø 15% | 3-31 >400 SCC). While the methods used for evaluation might not be able to detect subtle but significant improvements, results indicate that there are still significant animal welfare problems on the subsidised farms. To improve the effectiveness of the policy measure, modifications should be introduced: The resource-oriented requirements can be adapted to provide for a better access to water, adequate cubicles and calving pens. Additionally, result oriented elements need to be implemented to address issues of animal health.