

Development of a customer-specific broiler welfare assessment programme

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In order to guarantee production according to a defined welfare standard, and to increase the transparency to customers, Heijmans Food Products BV is currently developing a broiler welfare assessment programme specific for its own production chain. Previously developed welfare assessment protocols are available, e.g. from Welfare Quality, but these are relatively time consuming and therefore difficult to implement in practice. On broiler farms and at the slaughter plant many data are routinely collected and can possibly be integrated in a modified welfare assessment programme. The aim therefore was to develop a specific welfare assessment programme that can be incorporated into the routine procedures of the producer, and that consists of valid, reliable and feasible measures of broiler welfare. The framework was based on Welfare Quality and animal-based measures were preferred over resource-based measures. Four stages in the development process could be identified: (1) define a list of potential measures using the five principles of Welfare Quality; (2) selection of indicators, based on validity, reliability and feasibility; (3) define a classification and an impact score to calculate a measure score; (4) graphical representation of the scores per flock. In stage (1) and (2) eleven measures of on-farm welfare were selected. These included similar measures as in Welfare Quality, such as foot pad dermatitis, but also new measures that are collected routinely, such as the daily dose of antibiotic treatments. For each of these measures either a scoring was developed or an existing scoring was used, and the measure score was calculated by calculating score×impact. The scores for the individual measures are presented in a spider web. The prototype is currently tested using existing farm data and the model will be extended with measures indicative of the welfare during the end-of-life process.