

GUIDANCE FROM THE ANIMAL WELFARE WORKING GROUP TO AD HOC GROUPS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS

When 'welfare codes' were first developed in the 1970s and 1980s, they tended to contain truisms such as 'Animals should have adequate space' and 'Noise levels should not be excessive'. Although such statements can be useful to identify important variables in the course of providing more specific advice, they do not provide any implementable information or any means of determining whether a given practice or facility is in compliance. In contrast, an OIE animal welfare standard should contain recommendations that can be implemented, and criteria that can be used to tell whether a given practice or facility is in compliance with the standard.

Outcome-based or animal-based criteria should be used where possible because they are generally related most directly to animal welfare, and because they can be applied to a wide range of production systems. Such criteria can be qualitative (all animals should be able to lie down at the same time without lying on top of each other) or quantitative (no more than 1% of animals should be dead on arrival).

In some cases, input-based or resource-based criteria are also acceptable and can supplement outcome-based criteria where there is a good scientific basis for doing so, may be possible. For example if welfare is likely to be reduced by a certain factor in a wide range of systems. Again these can be qualitative (no animal should be hoisted while conscious) or quantitative (ammonia level in the air should not exceed 25 ppm).

In other cases, 'conditional' criteria can be used. These generally specify what actions should be taken under certain conditions. These can include both qualitative and quantitative elements, respectively, as in: (1) If more than 2% of birds arrive at the slaughter plant with broken wings, catching crews should be re-trained to catch birds in ways that are less likely to cause injuries. (2) In months where hot weather is expected, stocking density should be reduced so that birds have enough space to perform wing-stretching unimpeded. (2) if more than 2% of birds arrive at the slaughter plant with broken wings, catching crews should be re-trained to catch birds in ways that are less likely to cause injuries.

For certain variables, it is possible to identify 'critical levels' beyond which welfare is expected to be affected. Such levels are normally determined by scientific research. For example, welfare in many species is noticeably affected if ammonia levels in the air exceed 25 ppm.

For other variables (percent lame, percent dead during transport) there are no critical levels but it may be possible to set or recommend 'performance targets'. In the case of performance targets, an *ad hoc* committee may be able to agree that a certain level of performance should be achieved broadly, for example, that no more than 1% of animals should fall while being moved in a slaughter facility. In other cases, there may be so much variation between breeds or locations that a standard merely identifies variables that should be used to assess performance, and calls for national or breed-specific targets to be set. In such cases it is helpful to provide examples of performance targets from other standards that are broadly applicable under different conditions.

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