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Review

Animal welfare assessment at slaughter in Europe: Moving from inputs to outputs

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Abstract

Producers, retailers and other food chain actors increasingly recognize that consumer concerns for good animal welfare represent a business opportunity that could be profitably incorporated into their commercial strategies. Therefore, during the last decade, numerous trade groups (producers, processors, retailers and restaurant chains) have developed certification systems with their suppliers which include elements of animal welfare. The Welfare Quality® project has developed an integrated and standardised welfare assessment system based on twelve welfare criteria grouped into four main principles (good feeding, good housing, good health and appropriate behaviour) according to how they are experienced by animals. One of the innovations of the Welfare Quality® assessment system is that it focuses more on outcome measures (e.g. directly related to animal body condition, health aspects, injuries, behaviour, etc.). This paper has the objective to discuss the rationale behind the welfare assessment and to describe the Welfare Quality® assessment of pigs and cattle at the slaughterhouse.

Highlights

► Market demand for higher animal welfare standards. ► The Welfare Quality® assessment is based on four principles and 12 criteria. ► Animal based measures are the most direct reflection of their actual welfare state. ► Measures should be valid, reliable and feasible. ► In all assessment systems, the critical 'component' is the assessor.

Keywords

- Animal welfare;
- Cattle;
- Outcomes;
- Pigs;
- Slaughterhouse;
- Welfare Quality®