



Interim Report on the Animal Welfare Implications of Farm Assurance Schemes

August 2001

Farm Animal Welfare Council
1A Page Street, London SW1P 4PQ



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FOREWORD

In April 1999, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) was asked by Ministers to consider the implications of Farm Assurance Schemes for the welfare of the animals covered by such schemes. Farm Assurance Schemes were at that time, and continue to be, rapidly developing in the UK, driven in the main by either retailers or by consortia of producers.

Farm Assurance Schemes have the potential to raise welfare standards significantly and, additionally, to provide recognition of such higher standards to the consuming public. However, the question has to be asked whether this potential is being fully realised. Furthermore, are the schemes sufficiently transparent in their welfare standards that the consumer feels fully informed when making choices about which products to buy based upon welfare standards?

In May 2000, FAWC announced its decision to take a “food chain” approach to farm animal welfare, recognising that the standards of welfare under which animals are produced are effectively a quality characteristic of the products consumed. We believe it is not logical to act as though the concerns in our society about animal welfare relate only to British livestock production. Nor do we believe that consumers should be prevented from making informed choices with regard to the welfare provenance of the livestock products which they choose to consume. In this context, however, if properly implemented farm assurance schemes offer a means whereby the link between animal production conditions and the final food product can be made clear. If this is to be achieved, it is essential that the assurances provided not only by retailers, but also by the catering and food processing industries, should be equally informative and trustworthy to command consumer confidence.

In this interim report, we have attempted to consider how current Farm Assurance Schemes may meet, or fall short of, providing the information necessary for our “food chain” approach. The schemes are developing rapidly, and we believe an interim report is justified at this stage to serve two purposes; to describe the current status of schemes from a welfare perspective, and to discuss some key issues which have emerged and which will be more fully considered in our final report to be published in 2002.

Clearly, methods of audit and assessment are critical to the degree of trust which consumers can place on schemes. And the competence and independence of any over-arching body which may monitor the welfare components of farm assurance standards are equally essential. It has been suggested that FAWC should be

involved in this standard setting role but the Council fears that this may undermine public confidence in the independence of its broader advisory role.

I hope those reading this interim report will be stimulated to comment to us on the key issues we have raised. Such comments will inevitably enhance the final report next year. Meanwhile, the Council believes that all the recommendations made in this interim report should be acted upon without awaiting the final report.

Dr Judy MacArthur Clark

Chairwoman

Farm Animal Welfare Council

August 2001

PART I

INTRODUCTION

1. In April 1999 the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) was asked by MAFF¹ to consider the relationship between farm assurance schemes and animal welfare. In July that year the Council embarked on a study of the implications for animal welfare arising from farm assurance schemes. The remit of the working group set up to look into this subject was to review farm assurance schemes applying to animals on farm, at market, in transit and at place of slaughter to ascertain whether they are effective in delivering desirable animal welfare standards. A public consultation was launched (Appendix A) and written evidence was received from a wide range of organisations with an interest in animal welfare. Oral evidence was taken from the Animal Welfare, Science, Ethics and Law Veterinary Association (AWSELVA); United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS); the main scheme providers; Assured Food Standards (AFS); producer organisations; retailers; representatives of the food service industry, consumer and other organisations. Those who gave evidence and information are listed at Appendix B. We are grateful to all who participated in the study and gave of their time and expertise. A glossary of the acronyms used in this report is at Appendix C.

2. The Council decided to produce an interim report in view of the complexity and the wide range of the issues concerned, the evolving nature of the schemes themselves, and hence the length of time before a final report could be prepared when all relevant aspects had been considered. This interim report is essentially a background document, which discusses some of the key issues that have emerged and indicates the direction of our thoughts. We are taking the opportunity of using this report to raise issues, which we hope to consider in greater depth in our subsequent report, and would welcome any comments that it might stimulate. We are continuing our investigations into whether the farm assurance framework can deliver credible assurance on the welfare standards under which farm animals are kept. We intend to look into this area in greater depth before we conclude in our final report.

Five Freedoms

3. The Five Freedoms are a well-established set of propositions which provide a core framework encompassing an animal's basic needs, whether on farm, in

¹ Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) became part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in June 2001.

transit, at market or at the place of slaughter. They declare a series of ‘freedoms’ and implied husbandry requirements, which underlie good farm animal welfare.

FREEDOM FROM HUNGER AND THIRST

by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.

FREEDOM FROM DISCOMFORT

by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

FREEDOM FROM PAIN, INJURY AND DISEASE

by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

FREEDOM TO EXPRESS NORMAL BEHAVIOUR

by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal’s own kind.

FREEDOM FROM FEAR AND DISTRESS

by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

4. The concept and content of the Five Freedoms have guided FAWC’s philosophy of approach in all its studies. They provide widely accepted guidelines to all concerned with the keeping of livestock as to how they might fulfil their obligation to the animals they use at every stage of production. The Freedoms have provided the backdrop to our study into the relationship between farm assurance schemes and farm animal welfare. Based on the Five Freedoms we would expect farm assurance schemes to include explicit welfare standards relating to the following aspects of production:

- Provision of nutrition and water.
- Housing and handling facilities, bedding and environmental controls.
- Health management and supervision, control measures to prevent as well as treat disease.
- Space requirements, stockmanship, hygiene and management practices.
- Amelioration of behavioural vices and of practices which compromise animal welfare.
- Protocols relating to transport, markets and abattoirs.
- Implementation of welfare policy.

We would expect a requirement for appropriate records to be kept to demonstrate adherence to the standards specified in assurance schemes.

5. Safeguarding and improving animal welfare requires awareness of animal needs and both caring and careful efforts on the part of those involved. In particular it requires: the recognition of animals as sentient beings; informed, skilled and conscientious stockmanship; caring, responsible planning and effective management; the responsible use of genetic selection and other technology; appropriate living conditions; considerate handling at all times on farm, at markets and during transport and slaughter. We believe that these aspects of animal husbandry should be explicitly embodied in farm assurance schemes, if they are to make a beneficial contribution to animal welfare.

Provenance of the ‘food we eat’

6. In May 2000, the Council decided that its advice regarding the welfare of farm animals should logically relate to food production in general, irrespective of whether that food came from a production system at home or abroad. Recognition that the welfare standards under which animals are produced is effectively a quality characteristic of livestock products consumed. This is an important consideration, which is central to this report.

7. The food industry plays an essential part in the implementation of welfare standards by virtue of the influence it exerts in the sourcing of livestock products. The application of welfare standards to the ‘food we eat’ rather than the ‘food we produce’ has great relevance in this context. A logical consequence is that the animal welfare standards relevant to our society should relate equally to the livestock products we import as well as those we produce at home. Increasing recognition of consumers’ concern about the welfare provenance of the food they eat should ultimately result in the establishment and acceptance of baseline welfare standards. By adopting baseline standards for animal welfare for all livestock products consumed, the Council believes that Britain can continue to play a leading role in raising animal welfare awareness internationally.

‘Quality Assurance’ versus ‘Farm Assurance’

8. During our information gathering process it became evident that the terms ‘quality assurance’ and ‘farm assurance’ were treated by some as being synonymous while others considered them to be quite different. Quality assurance schemes aim to satisfy consumers that stipulated standards relating to characteristics of a product are met during its production process. We consider that farm assurance, therefore, should be a component part of all quality assurance schemes, that relate to livestock products. Our definition of farm assurance encompasses the conditions to which farm animals within such schemes are exposed whilst they are alive (after slaughter they become ‘livestock products’

in which other characteristics of assurance will then apply). However it is worth noting that some food quality assurance schemes may not include farm assurance. For the purpose of this report we have taken 'quality assurance' as representing the generic term and 'farm assurance' to represent the application of the quality assurance principles to schemes at farm level and/or to schemes which apply along the food chain, at market, in transit and up to the point of slaughter. In considering the welfare implications of farm assurance schemes, we have looked at the assurances relating to the way animals are cared for, from birth to slaughter, as a result of being part of an assurance scheme.

The role of farm assurance

9. Our starting hypothesis is that farm assurance schemes represent a voluntary private sector/market based framework – in contrast to a public sector/regulatory framework – for ensuring the application of animal welfare conditions. We therefore view assurance as a 'formal guarantee' or 'positive declaration' proffered by the suppliers, designed to give the consumer confidence regarding the provenance of the livestock product covered by that assurance. However, we believe this to be a two-way process. In order that farm assurance schemes meet their objectives, the assurance provided has to be accepted by the consumer. If the assurance is accepted and the product purchased, consumers are effectively putting their trust in the veracity of the product.

PART II

BACKGROUND

Legislative background

10. The foundations of the welfare components of farm assurance schemes are set by current animal welfare legislation and species specific Codes of Recommendations. The general provision of The Protection of Animals Act 1911, making it an offence to ill-treat or cause any unnecessary suffering to any animal, still forms the basis of UK animal welfare law today. The welfare of livestock kept on-farm is protected by the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968, which makes it an offence to cause or allow livestock any unnecessary pain or distress. The Codes of Recommendations for the welfare of farmed animals are made under this Act. The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2000 implement four EU Directives that set minimum standards for the welfare of all farm animals across the European Union. These Regulations cover all farmed animals and lay down requirements in respect of general welfare, inspection, buildings and equipment, feeding and watering, as well as additional provisions for specific species. Similar Regulations have been introduced in Scotland and in Wales.

11. The Food Safety Act (1990) with its requirement for due diligence is widely regarded as providing a powerful stimulus for the development of retailer-led assurance schemes. Specific retailer requirements in addition to those of the Food Safety Act have formed the basis of these schemes so far. The development of producer organisation schemes in Scotland pre-dated the Food Safety Act whilst those in England and Wales developed subsequently. The main driving force behind the growth of farm assurance schemes has been, and will remain, the need for suppliers in the food chain to keep faith with their customers. As consumers have become more discerning and more concerned about the provenance of the food they eat, their need for reassurance regarding the integrity of the system which produces that food has grown and is likely to increase. The prime objective of the producer organisation schemes so far has been to demonstrate that assured farms meet the requirements of due diligence by putting in place systems of food safety and traceability; medicine and veterinary treatments; food composition and storage requirements; animal welfare standards that comply with legislation and welfare codes and environmental obligations. In this interim report we are investigating whether this framework can, in principle, deliver assurance on the welfare standards under which farm animals are kept.

12. Assurance concerning the nature of any product is provided to consumers only if the product is labelled accordingly and the definition of that label, including the production standards, is independently certified. Hence labelling remains a key issue for assurance schemes. Without labelling, there is no information. Without certification, there is no assurance. Detailed food labelling rules are agreed at European level (EU Directive 2000/13) and are implemented in Great Britain by the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Food Labelling Regulations 1996, as amended. The Trade Description Act 1968 makes it an offence to make false or misleading statements about any goods, including food. However, there are no legislative requirements specifically relating to labelling food as farm assured. Consumers are faced with a wide range of descriptions in relation to farm assured products with little means of knowing whether they have a sound foundation. The Food Standards Agency has been involved in discussions with consumer organisations with the objective of improving labelling.

European harmonisation

13. The Euro-Retailer Produce Working Group (EUREP), representing a group of food retailers in Europe, has produced a draft protocol for livestock production, setting out the principles of Good Agricultural Practice (GAP). The draft protocol covers a range of elements for the development of good practice in animal production, including animal welfare. Such an approach is to be welcomed if it proves to be a mechanism by which animal welfare standards may be harmonised across Europe and beyond.

14. The European Commission has proposed the establishment of a European Food Authority (EFA) which is intended to be operational by 2002. The Regulation establishing the EFA is also designed to harmonise general food law in the Community in order to ensure a high level of consumer protection and the effective functioning of the internal market in food.

Requirements of farm assurance

15. In the Council's view, credibility, transparency and traceability are the basic tenets of farm assurance. An assurance scheme needs to declare its intention publicly in relation to its standards; have a system in place which is capable of achieving these standards; be seen to be achieving the standards that it has set itself by means of regular independent verification; and specify appropriate action in relation to non-compliance. We have kept these requirements in the forefront of our minds as we have considered the principles that should underlie farm assurance schemes.

Agriculture and the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

16. Animal welfare standards differ between countries, including between the UK, the EU, developed countries and developing countries. This, therefore, makes it highly likely for a diversity of welfare provenance in the food sold in the UK, which imports a significant proportion of its livestock products. However, current WTO rules prevent discrimination between products purely on the basis of their methods of production. This makes it more difficult to get uniformity of welfare provenance in the food we eat. The Government is committed to encouraging the wider adoption of improved standards outside the EU as part of the multi-lateral standard-setting process. The EU has recently declared its support for including animal welfare in WTO discussions. FAWC has over the years stressed the need for consideration of animal welfare to be included in the WTO negotiations and is pleased to note these developments.

17. The European Union's proposed negotiating position for the WTO agricultural negotiations seeks to ensure that trade liberalisation does not undermine efforts to improve the protection of the welfare of animals. The proposals include the development of multi-lateral agreements, appropriate labelling rules and arrangements for compensation payments to producers in recognition of additional costs directly related to higher welfare standards. The Council welcomes and encourages the position adopted by the EU.

PART III

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF FARM ASSURANCE SCHEMES

18. Increasing concern within society about animal welfare issues was a major impetus for the development of assurance schemes. The development of farm assurance schemes in the livestock sector, in the wake of the Food Safety Act (1990), has been accelerated by a series of health hazards, notably the advent of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and the E.Coli 0157 outbreak in 1996. Thus over the years the emphasis has moved from animal welfare to food safety but now includes environmental and other quality attributes of the product. However, the need to boost flagging consumer confidence in the livestock sector has proved to be, and remains, a powerful incentive for the development of farm assurance schemes, which are attempts to create specific brand images.

19. Farm assurance started in Scotland in the late 80s with the development of the Scottish Pig Industry Initiative (SPII) followed by the Farm Assured Scottish Lamb Scheme (FASL). Between 1984 and 1993, Food From Britain (FFB) was responsible for a certification system which set out quality criteria and inspection systems for specific sectors including (until 1987) organic products. This centralised scheme was brought to an end by the Government in 1993, leaving responsibility for developing quality assurance schemes squarely on the industry. A wide range of organisations have become involved in farm assurance since that time.

20. The retailers represented the major force for the development of farm assurance schemes in the early years. Since then there has been a shift to producer-led schemes with the emphasis on co-ordinating developments and rationalising schemes under umbrella organisations. The organic certification schemes can be distinguished from other schemes as they have a legal base (Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91) and are based on a 'whole system' approach to the farming operation. The Freedom Food Scheme launched by the RSPCA in 1994 is unique in that the quality assurance standards have been developed with the primary focus on animal welfare, using as far as possible, science based animal welfare criteria. Freedom Food has provided a distinct lead in relation to the importance placed on the welfare component of its schemes, while delivering the core requirements of industry based schemes.

Objectives of farm assurance

21. The declared objective of most farm assurance schemes has been to implement an independently validated system of standards and inspections at initial

stages of the supply chain, from the point of production to slaughter. Whilst some assurance schemes are confined to 'on farm' production, others span the distribution and sale of livestock, covering transport, markets and abattoirs. As farm assurance schemes evolve the trend is towards complete integration of assurance along the supply-chain, linking animal feeding stuffs, production, transport, markets, abattoirs, processors and retailers. The common objective is to inspire confidence on the part of the consumer so that the product is fully acceptable in terms of the way in which it has been produced. From a specific welfare point of view, our interest lies in how these schemes focus on the welfare of animals throughout the food chain; the standards that are set for their production; and the manner in which compliance with those standards is monitored by means of credible audit visits/inspections.

Welfare standards and specifications

22. Under controlled experimental conditions the scientific assessment of welfare is based on a range of indicators of an animal's well being such as behaviour, physiological responses and physical health. Positive welfare includes satisfaction of an animal's need, not merely the avoidance of cruelty. In practical terms, however, the accurate assessment of animal welfare remains difficult and often subjective, and still tends to be heavily dependent on human perceptions and reactions to husbandry conditions. This results in welfare standards in assurance schemes inevitably being qualitative, subjective and somewhat imprecise. A major challenge of direct relevance to this report, therefore, is the question of how scientific/technical approaches to assessing animal welfare can be translated to welfare assessment in the field. The development of practical and reliable welfare measures for use on farms and in other practical conditions is at an early stage and time is required for current research on this subject to be completed. Scheme standards have been compiled in various ways, the welfare legislation and codes forming the base of the pyramid with FAWC recommendations and other welfare enhancements being added on top to a greater or lesser extent. Transparency of the actual welfare component in scheme standards and their continuous development, keeping pace with scientific advances, are central to providing a springboard for enhancing animal welfare.

23. Most farm assurance schemes contain specifications relating to animal identification and traceability; on-farm veterinary medicine usage, vaccination programmes, disease management protocols and biosecurity. However, these are obviously most closely connected with food safety rather than animal welfare. By contrast, the welfare criteria in farm assurance schemes relate to the broad areas of animal husbandry; housing, environment, space allowance, health and nutrition, management and stockmanship, transport, slaughter and mutilations. In general there

is a lack of specific references to the selection and use of appropriate genetic lines and breeding programmes. Likewise, the question of the humane treatment of breeding animals at the end of their productive lives, especially if they are of low value, is seldom considered. Specifications relating to disease management protocols and biosecurity are common to both animal welfare and food safety. Good recording systems are required to ensure that these specifications provide a credible audit trail.

Audit procedures and verification

24. The welfare outcome of an assurance scheme is dependent on the level and specificity of the standards and the rigour and consistency with which they are enforced. Assurance of the welfare component of farm assurance schemes therefore depends on the credibility of the inspection and certification. The audit and inspection procedures, however well they are carried out, can only be judged against the scheme standards. The need for clear, unambiguous standards is therefore paramount. At the same time, over-prescriptive standards may stifle creativity. A balanced set of standards, which openly declare the aim and objectives of the scheme is a necessary pre-requisite to an effective, independent audit of the systems in place to deliver those standards.

25. Monitoring and control of the standards should be undertaken by independent assessors, with independent auditing at stipulated periods, supplemented by random checks. The transparency of the audit and the rigour with which it is conducted is central to the credibility of any assurance scheme. Existing members who fail an audit should be suspended from the scheme, unless the necessary improvements are made within a required period, or removed from the scheme as a last resort. In practice, non-compliance of producers applying for membership at the outset should lead them to make husbandry changes and take specific action to comply with the standards, or result in membership being denied. The majority of standards for farm assurance schemes relate to the provision of resources, rather than attempting to directly define the welfare of animals within the schemes. The underlying assumption appears to be that good welfare should automatically follow if animals are provided with the appropriate facilities. We were therefore interested in the development, by the RSPCA and Freedom Food, of objective measures of animal welfare, which they are currently considering in addition to their scheme standards. We look forward to seeing the outcome of research currently in progress to compare the welfare of animals on Freedom Food accredited and non-accredited farms to ascertain the effect of the Freedom Food standards and to identify ways in which the welfare standards can be improved. We were also interested in research being carried out into measures of welfare directly at animal level as an alternative to the usual environmental or management

measurements. For instance the objective measurement of pain and inflammation in farm animals would be a significant development in relation to the development of scheme standards.

Accreditation

26. The competence and integrity of independent evaluation by certification and inspection bodies is assessed and 'accredited' by national 'accreditation bodies'. The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is the sole accreditation body within the UK, and is a member of the European Co-operation for Accreditation. UKAS is recognised by Government to provide the market with confidence in the impartiality and technical competence of its independent evaluators. In addition the accreditation process provides assurance that evaluators have sufficient and appropriate resources and facilities, the ability to sustain performance and actively demonstrate their capability. Once accredited, evaluators are monitored annually and re-assessed every four years. There are five European Standards in relation to accreditation; the two standards relevant to farm assurance are EN 45011 (Product Certification Standard) and EN 45004 (Inspection Standard). It is worth noting that being accredited to EN 45011 simply means that an organisation is competent to certify to a specified set of criteria as defined in a given standard. For example, this has allowed both British and Danish pig producers working to different technical standards which meet the needs of their respective stakeholders to be certified by EN 45011 accredited certifiers.

27. Currently UK accreditation to EN 45011 is held by five certification bodies in respect of livestock products: EFSIS Certification Ltd (European Food Safety Inspection Service); PAI (Product Authentication Inspectorate); SFQC (Scottish Food Quality Certification Ltd); CMI certification (Checkmate International – formerly known as UKFQC); and QWFCL (Quality Welsh Food Certification Ltd). Two Farm Inspection bodies – Integra Food Secure Ltd and FIS (Farm Inspection Services) are also accredited, but to EN 45004. Inspection provides assurance of the compliance with the farm assurance standards at a particular point in time. Certification on the other hand provides assurance that there are systems in place to ensure that compliance with the farm assurance standards can take place on a continuing basis.

28. The European Co-operation for Accreditation (EA) launched in November 1997 is responsible for developing and ensuring the maintenance of the equivalence of certification/inspection bodies across Europe through Mutual Recognition Agreements. Fifteen national accreditation bodies, including the UK, have signed a multi-lateral agreement, which means that the participants have agreed to recognise each others' accreditation.

PART IV

CURRENT STATUS OF SCHEME IMPLEMENTATION

29. Assured British Meats (ABM) was launched in 1998 with the aim of establishing a single national assurance scheme in the meat sector by means of continuous integration along the food chain including feed, transport, markets and abattoirs. With the formation of Assured Food Standards (AFS), ABM has restructured and is now solely responsible for setting red meat standards. Responsibility for developing an integrated pork assurance chain has been passed to Assured British Pigs (AB Pigs) and responsibility for developing an integrated beef and lamb chain has been passed to Farm Assured British Beef and Lamb (FABBL).

The British Farm Standard

30. The British Farm Standard (red tractor logo) was launched by the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales (NFU) in June 2000. We have been told that schemes that wish to use the mark must deliver credible assurance in relation to food safety, animal welfare and environmental responsibility and have achieved or be working towards accreditation by UKAS. The red tractor logo currently applies to primary products but could be developed further so that processed products may be included if the main ingredients qualify.

Assured Food Standards (AFS)

31. AFS is a company limited by guarantee and owned by a Council of assurance schemes, the NFU and the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC). It is responsible for licensing and policing the use of the red tractor logo and for developing equivalence arrangements with other standards in the UK and, where necessary, abroad. The assurance schemes currently underpinned by AFS are Assured Chicken Production Limited, Assured Crops Limited, Assured Produce Limited, Farm Assured British Beef and Lamb Limited, Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assurance Scheme, National Dairy Farm Assurance Scheme Limited, Assured British Pigs Limited, Farm Assured Welsh Livestock Scheme and the ruminants module of the Genesis Quality Assurance Scheme. AFS is run by a Board comprising some representatives of the Assurance Schemes, farming interests and independent members.

32. We understand that discussions are taking place between AFS and Scottish scheme providers over access for Scottish producers to use the red tractor logo. Consolidation of assurance schemes under the AFS umbrella might be seen as an important step in the evolution of assurance schemes in so far as it should result in rationalisation of inspection efforts and certification activity as well as creating a more readily identifiable brand to facilitate consumer recognition. On the other hand, such uniformity could just lead to the ossification of standards, lack of dynamism and settling at a static minimum, which could eventually disadvantage animal welfare.

Organic Certification Schemes

33. The organic sector has gone down a different route with the establishment of the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards, (UKROFS) by Agriculture Ministers in 1987 as the competent authority. European Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91, which lays down the requirements of organic schemes, stipulates compliance with EN 45011. From August 2000, livestock production has been embraced by a Council Regulation (EC) No. 1804/99 which amends Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91. UKROFS is responsible for monitoring and approving the work of a number of organic sector bodies which are responsible for the inspection and certification of organic producers and processors, and ensuring that the bodies are implementing the requirements of EC legislation correctly. UKROFS is also responsible for implementing standards for the production and control of organic products in the UK in accordance with the requirements of the appropriate legislation. The organic certification scheme is quite distinct from farm assurance schemes in that UKROFS effectively has the accreditation role. All operators are subject to at least an annual inspection by their sector body. UKROFS carries out a random audit on a proportion (about 5%) of operators certified by sector bodies to check the effectiveness of the organic sector body in implementing the EC Regulation. A check is also carried out at the headquarters of the sector body to ensure that its administrative arrangements are adequate and continue to comply with EN 45011 requirements.

34. The House of Commons Agriculture Select Committee Report on Organic Farming, published in January 2001, recommended that “MAFF facilitate discussions between farm assurance schemes and the organic certification sector with a view to ensuring agreement on common core values and inspection protocols and with the goal of a single inspection process and shared symbols”. We consider that the first priority is to assess the animal welfare impact of the new European rules for livestock products. We are concerned for example, about restrictions imposed on the use of conventional medicines for recurring problems like sheep scab and mastitis, and the potential implications for animal welfare.

Freedom Food Ltd

35. Freedom Food, set up by the RSPCA in 1994, was the first farm assurance scheme to concentrate primarily on animal welfare and now has a total of some 3000 members (as at July 2001). There are now specific sets of standards for seven different species of farm animals covering on-farm welfare, transit and slaughter. The scheme standards are on a par with national schemes in relation to the other aspects of assurance but with higher welfare criteria. Producers are annually assessed against scheme standards by assessors who are trained auditors with specific knowledge of the industry. Health plans are seen as a valuable aspect of the scheme standards, enabling producers to assess risk and monitor any diseases on a farm. Freedom Food has established itself, in terms of animal welfare, as an identifiable, marketable brand name and sees itself as the conscience of the livestock production industry. Freedom Food is currently seeking certification with UKAS accredited certifiers for all schemes. This is currently in place for the pig scheme.

Membership of the main livestock assurance schemes in Great Britain (as at July 2001)

36. The Farm Assured British Beef and Lamb Scheme (FABBL) has 16,851 approved members, and is certified by EFSIS. The Farm Assured Welsh Livestock Scheme (FAWL) which is a division of Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Ltd has some 6,200 members, and is certified by Quality Welsh Food Certification (QWFC). The Quality Meat Scotland Farm Assurance Scheme has 9856 approved members and is certified by Scottish Food Quality Certification (SFQC). The welfare standards of the Freedom Food Scheme (launched in 1994) for beef cattle encompass 670 members, and their welfare standards for sheep cover 350 members.

37. Assured British Pigs (AB Pigs) has 2179 approved producers in England and Wales and is certified by EFSIS. The Scottish Pig Industry Initiative has 267 approved members and is certified by SFQC. The Freedom Food Scheme for pigs has over 500 members.

38. The British Egg Industry Council Lion Mark Quality Scheme has some 1200 registered premises. The Freedom Food Scheme for free-range eggs has over 850 members.

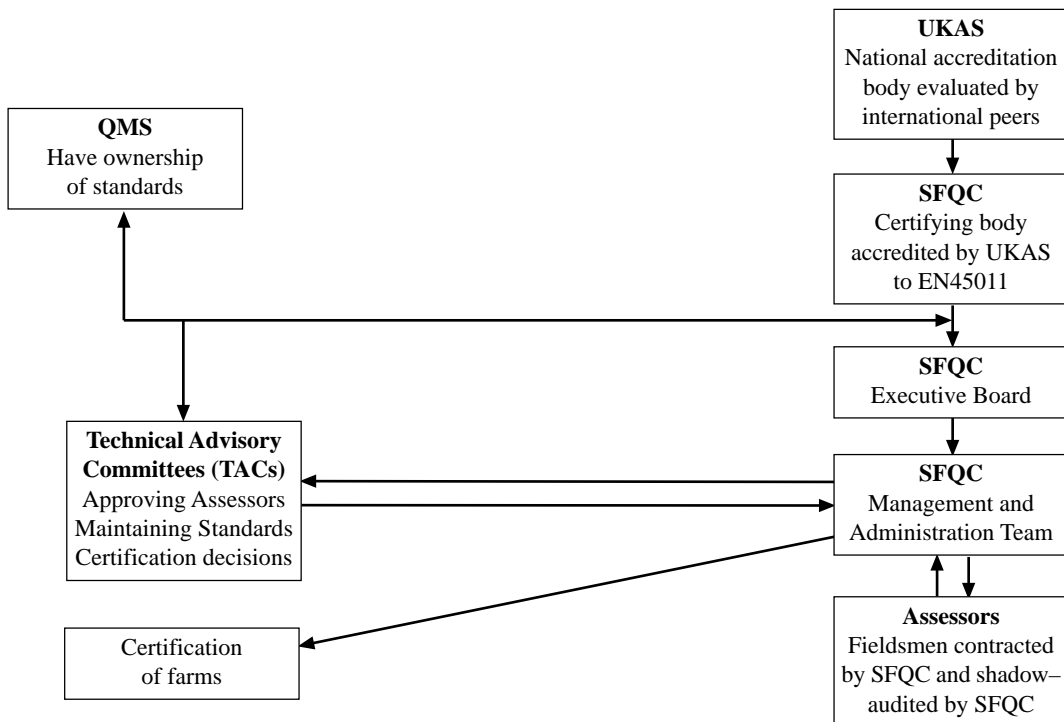
39. The Assured Chicken Production Scheme (ACP) was launched in March 2000. There are 1730 farms/sites registered with ACP. Approval and certification

of individual sites is currently based on self-assessment subject to independent verification by CMI Certification over a three year period. The Freedom Food Scheme for chickens includes 57 production units.

40. The National Dairy Farm Assurance Scheme launched in September 1999 has an overall membership of 23 first purchasers of milk, representing some 16,500 milk producers. The purchasers (dairy companies) participating in the scheme can either adopt the scheme in its entirety or integrate it with the schemes they already operate. The Freedom Food Scheme accounts for some 250 milk producers.

Interaction between accreditation, certification and scheme providers

41. The relationship between accreditation bodies, certification bodies and the scheme providers is illustrated in the following flow diagram, using the interaction between UKAS, SFQC and Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) as an example. SFQC was established in 1995 by the schemes (Scottish Pig Industry Initiative; Scotch Quality Beef and Lamb Association; Scottish Quality Cereals; Scottish Quality Trout) which at that point owned the company. SFQC became an independent certification body to offer quality assurance services to the Scottish food, farming and fisheries sectors and it was accredited to the EN 45011 standard. SFQC provides certification under EN 45011 to a range of scheme providers and issues certificates to those farms meeting the scheme standards.



42. In this example, the scheme owner is QMS and farms in the scheme are certified by SFQC (the certifying body) to QMS standards. SFQC in turn is accredited by UKAS (the national accreditation body). The scheme standards were established by the QMS Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) through a consultative process, which in this case included the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA). Multiple retailers, the Scottish Consumer Council and animal welfare organisations were also included in the consultation process. All certified farms receive an annual inspection. SFQC has responsibility for ensuring the competence of its assessors. UKAS requires that those undertaking farm assessment do not carry out certification decisions. Overall, UKAS ensures that the scheme owner is not in a position to influence decisions on certification.

PART V

SECTORAL ATTITUDES TO ASSURANCE SCHEMES

Consumer attitudes

43. The development of assurance schemes in the livestock sector has been fuelled by the need to restore consumer confidence in the provenance and method of production of food, coupled with the growing interest of consumers in various 'quality' aspects of food. It is generally perceived that demand from the consumer for food with particular quality characteristics has led to the production of a wide range of products to satisfy that demand. However, the evidence presented to us by the consumer organisations indicated that on average consumers did not feel that they had sufficient information in order to make an informed choice. It is therefore unclear as to the extent to which the food consumers (as opposed to the scheme providers) are actually driving farm assurance; and hence whether they are gaining benefit.

44. The results of the FSA's Better Food Labelling Initiative – a survey of food consumers published in July 2000 – indicated that improved labelling related to animal welfare was high on the list of priorities for many of those responding to the survey. The majority wanted to be able to support those foods that were produced humanely and thought it essential that information about the method of rearing and the production system should be given on the label. In the case of meat and egg products, many wanted to know whether the food originated from an intensive or free-range system. A very high level of interest was focused on clearer country of origin indications, with information being sought about the country in which the animal was reared rather than the country where the food was produced or packed.

45. We were told in the course of our investigations that most consumers did not fully understand the meaning of farm assurance schemes and that more knowledge needs to be imparted to the consumers to enable them to exercise their choice. The view was expressed that the term 'farm assured' was not of particular merit if it implied the product met standards no higher than the legal requirements. The rationalisation of assurance schemes was welcomed by the consumer organisations. Consumer surveys have tended to show that whilst the majority of those surveyed stated that they would be prepared to pay more for humane methods of production, this was not always borne out by the contents of their shopping baskets.

Retailer attitudes

46. The retailers' key objective in implementing assurance schemes was to gain the implicit trust of their customers. Once this trust is established, it is expected that consumer concerns regarding food safety, animal welfare and environmental issues are devolved to the retailer. Many retailers told us that the level of customer interest in animal welfare was small and increased only when there was a specific media campaign. It therefore appears that the major retailers are effectively taking the place of the consumer in exercising choice and in deciding the criteria and emphasis placed on the manner in which farm livestock are kept. This makes the retailer potentially very powerful in driving demand and influencing the setting of standards.

47. The retailer schemes that were launched in the last decade initially developed in two main directions. Some schemes were set up with the objective of ensuring the integrity of the product by complying with traceability and the minimum welfare/environmental requirements, providing what might be termed 'baseline assurance'. Others had specific enhancements built in to their scheme, which created a point of difference and aimed to develop a distinctive branded 'quality image' to the product. For this reason retailers became protective of the details of their schemes, regarding them as commercially sensitive information. The development of national schemes, where the standards were largely identical to the baseline retailer schemes, has tended to halt the evolution of differentiated retailer schemes. Some retailers seem to have been content with the national schemes and were no longer particularly keen to differentiate their products on the basis of higher welfare. On the other hand, retailers who have differentiated their product by adding higher welfare conditions to the basic conditions are likely to continue to distinguish their schemes from the national schemes as long as they provide a marketing advantage. A study of the degree and extent to which animal welfare is prioritised within retailer schemes is provided at Appendix D.

48. Where an assurance scheme adopts higher welfare standards it is in the interest of the scheme provider that the 'difference' is clearly communicated to the consumer, who may thereby wish to make a positive purchasing selection in favour of the higher welfare product. In order to make this comparison, livestock products that meet minimum welfare standards and those that fall below this minimum need to be clearly distinguished. Labelling is obviously the only way of achieving this objective. Not only would this allow consumer preference to be exercised, it would also enable a clearer distinction between home produced foods produced to different standards as well as their imported counterparts.

49. The purchasing power of the major retailers makes them an effective agent for bringing about welfare improvements in the livestock sector if they choose to do so. Whilst WTO rules prevent discrimination between products purely on the basis of their method of production, retailers are not subject to such restrictions when making their sourcing decisions. They are thus in a position to make far-reaching changes to animal welfare if they choose to impose very specific and higher standards and apply them to everything they source whether at home or abroad. Some retailers have been quick in responding to welfare concerns in this way by adopting high welfare criteria in their scheme standards ahead of legislation.

50. Some of the retailers claim to ensure parity of production standards between suppliers in this country and overseas suppliers in relation to farm assured products, but we have not seen any evidence so far to demonstrate that inspections/audits of overseas supplies are on par with the systems in place in this country. In such cases there is a considerable amount of consumer trust placed in the control and monitoring of the retailers' audit procedures. In turn retailers need to ensure that they are worthy of the trust placed in them or suffer a severe backlash if that trust is subsequently proved to be unfounded.

51. It became evident in our enquiries that while many retailers accepted the broad principle of farm assurance, and wished to be associated with suitably high animal welfare standards, they were reluctant to both apply those standards rigidly to all livestock products they sold and to emphasise their assurance standards as a unique selling point. In some respects it appeared they did not wish to raise the topic of animal welfare in the minds of consumers to whom it was not otherwise an issue, introducing the association between meat eating and live animals or highlighting concerns that might have a negative spillover effect on other livestock products. In addition, a rigid adherence to strict assurance standards reduced flexibility in ad hoc sourcing from different locations for particular purposes, such as special promotions or at times of shortage of supply. Finally, most retailers logically provide a range of lines within any product type and would not wish to constrain their ability to supply the low-priced 'budget' lines by applying the same standards applied to the higher priced 'quality' lines.

Food service sector attitudes

52. FAWC's decision to focus on the welfare standards under which food animals are reared and produced has clear implications for the food service industry. Consumer expenditure on catering services continues to grow, particularly in relation to fast food outlets, restaurants and pubs. In 2000, there were over 370,000 restaurants and other catering establishments in Great Britain (including kitchens in

institutional premises, public houses, hotels, hospitals, take-aways and Bed and Breakfast establishments), and over 20 per cent of consumer expenditure on food is now spent on the catering sector.

53. The general impression we were given by representatives of the food service sector was that consumers appeared to adopt a different set of values when they entered a restaurant or fast food outlet, as compared to when purchasing food off a supermarket shelf. The evidence provided by some caterers indicated that consumer perception would need to change in this area, creating a clear demand for welfare friendly products, before the industry would react positively in this direction. Some claimed that they had an interest in animal welfare and undertook continuous monitoring and traceability via supplier audits, but it was not promoted by their outlets. We were also told that companies expected wholesalers and slaughterhouses to take animal welfare issues into consideration (but did not monitor that expectation). Food quality in the conventional sense, value for money – hence cost – and consistency of supply were asserted as the major drivers. Cost was considered to be the dominant factor, leading many companies to source livestock products from outside the UK. It was felt by the caterers that the UK livestock industry was unable to provide them with adequate supplies within the parameters of their demands. We were disappointed by the lack of a more robust response from this sector, and believe they could adopt a much more progressive and influential stance if they seriously confronted the issue of animal welfare and its growing importance to food consumers.

54. However, we are aware of at least two major food service organisations that have homed in on animal welfare as a quality characteristic of their food. The success of such organisations are indicators of the potential of the catering end of the food chain to exert more influence on production systems and to improve animal welfare both nationally and internationally. The diversity of different catering operations and relationships with hospitality, leisure and food service make it difficult for the sector to represent itself effectively and we hope to widen our study in this area before we conclude our final report. We believe that caterers operating in the public sector – for example, schools, hospitals, prisons, government establishments, the armed forces – could all take a stronger leadership role if the issue was given greater emphasis by government.

Producer attitudes

55. We intend to look at participating producers' perceptions of farm assurance schemes in more depth in our final report. Whether livestock producers would derive a financial benefit by producing to assurance scheme standards depends on

whether any additional premium on standard market price is gained. The evidence we have received indicates that the benefit of belonging to most quality assurance schemes is no longer to gain a premium but to have a wider range of marketing options, with non-assured animals or products progressively becoming the residual market. The perception of the producer is that the shift in emphasis from retailer schemes to rationalised producer schemes has also resulted in costs associated with scheme membership being incurred at producer level. The annual cost to producers participating in quality assurance schemes is principally the annual subscription charge, which may be at a flat rate or dependent on the size of the unit, farm size or farm turnover. There are no membership charges for some schemes particularly the retailer schemes. Whatever costs are necessary to bring facilities and management procedures up to the required standard would represent an initial cost, and will inevitably vary widely from farm to farm.

Other sectors

56. We have not completed our discussion with the advisory sector, suppliers of farming inputs, hauliers and transporters, market operators and slaughterers. We intend to take evidence from all these sectors before completing our final report.

PART VI

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF WELFARE STANDARDS

57. Verification that the standards of a scheme are being complied with is a crucial element in determining the credibility of an assurance scheme. The principles of administering certification schemes under EN 45011 stipulate that inspection and certification should be separate activities to ensure independence and impartiality. There was general agreement from all quarters that auditing and inspection were key to ensuring the veracity of an assurance scheme.

58. The terms ‘inspection’ and ‘audit’ appeared to be sometimes interchangeable in the evidence presented to us, but we understand that an inspection is equivalent to a snapshot taken on the day whilst an audit would check on the systems and procedures in place to ensure compliance. Verifiers should be trained in the audit process and ideally be knowledgeable about the particular production process. Most schemes have independent verification of the producer systems against the scheme protocol.

59. The vital role played by the stockperson in enhancing animal welfare was recognised and endorsed by all the organisations that provided evidence in the context of this study. They also emphasised the difficulties inherent in assessing the competency of stockpeople, highlighting the need for a consistent methodology to measure and assess good stockmanship and to provide relevant training and development.

60. Stockmanship is an area where it is difficult to come up with clear, auditable standards, and this is evident in the majority of the schemes. Scheme auditors would require considerable skill and experience to make a reasonably accurate assessment of the quality of stockmanship, given the complexity of the subject and the lack of detailed specification. The difficulties of objective assessment in this area are accentuated by the need to achieve some degree of consistency between auditors to ensure that all producers are treated fairly. However, the development of methods of directly assessing the health and welfare of animals may well provide an effective way of monitoring the level of stockmanship.

61. The variation in the specification and standards of the schemes across the welfare criteria and the largely unquantified nature of the welfare measures, particularly in the key area of stockmanship make the task of monitoring and control particularly difficult. If breaches of the specifications are difficult to detect

the rigour of the control procedures will inevitably be diminished. We feel that publishing details of non-compliance within schemes would lend transparency to the control procedure.

62. We believe that assurance schemes, even with only minimum welfare standards required by regulations and the codes, have served a useful purpose in spreading awareness of animal welfare and improving welfare on a voluntary basis and thereby improving compliance without recourse to the State Veterinary Service (SVS) and local enforcement authorities. This needs to be communicated to consumers who might feel that such schemes have not delivered in terms of animal welfare.

PART VII

MAIN ISSUES EMERGING FROM STUDY TO DATE

Objectives of schemes

63. In general, we have not seen a dominant animal welfare emphasis in farm assurance schemes except for the one run by Freedom Food. The schemes have grown primarily to have a traceability system in place to meet the obligations in relation to “due diligence”, and secondly to provide consumers with assurances regarding food safety, with welfare and environmental considerations as accessories.

Commonality versus diversity of schemes

64. Farm Assurance started out over ten years ago with a variety of schemes covering individual sectors set up by different organisations. The evolutionary trend in farm assurance schemes so far has been towards drawing together a multitude of schemes under national frameworks and umbrella organisations. This trend is set to continue with the creation of Assured Food Standards and the development of the red tractor logo. There are undoubted benefits of increased commonality of schemes to producers in terms of reduced compliance costs and greater freedom to switch between purchasers. Equally, the harmonisation and simplification of schemes benefit consumers who are bewildered by a wide assortment of schemes with little information by which to distinguish between them. However, greater commonality, while ensuring a uniform baseline, may lead to a stifling of creativity in relation to ongoing development of scheme standards and shifts in priority of the core components of farm assurance schemes. We are concerned that further standardisation of schemes should not lead to a dilution of the animal welfare components of such schemes, nor hinder any improvements.

Availability of information on schemes

65. We consider it imperative that information on assurance schemes – the declaration of scheme standards – should be made available to whoever is interested in the information. We are surprised that the retailer schemes do not readily put their scheme standards in the public domain. We believe that this is illogical and unacceptable and tantamount to their assuring a ‘quality’ that they are unwilling to openly define. A distinguishing quality mark or logo can provide easy identification with particular scheme standards but is no substitute for an open

declaration which can then be compared with the delivery of those standards. The rigour with which standards are delivered can be questioned by consumers who wish to do so only if the scheme standards are made accessible to them. Moreover, a declaration of standards is required to enable an assessment of the power or importance given to animal welfare by scheme providers, in the context of the overall mix of requirements in farm assurance schemes. Some retailers do not want to focus on animal welfare for fear that it might be off-putting to consumers who they perceive as being more interested in the presentation of food on the table than in its provenance. Another fear is that emphasising 'high welfare' products may be inconsistent with their perceived need to provide 'budget' products to consumers who may not be able to afford the 'high welfare' items.

Welfare parameters

66. The dearth of clear indicators which denote the welfare of animals in assurance schemes, makes an assessment of the welfare impact particularly difficult. On-farm welfare assessment methods are in their infancy and in the Organic Certification schemes, welfare tends to be implicit rather than explicit. The Freedom Food Scheme and assurance schemes in the milk sector are notable exceptions. The milk schemes, having come late to the assurance scene, have been able to learn from the experience of others. Organic schemes can be distinguished from the generality of farm assurance schemes, being part of a 'whole system' certification framework. However, we would expect them to meet the baseline, minimum welfare standards of farm assurance schemes.

Herd health plans

67. Herd health plans which are linked to farm assurance standards represent a key development in terms of animal health and welfare by virtue of their emphasis on accurate recording and monitoring of stipulated data and the importance of implementing the policies set out in the plan. The involvement of a private veterinary surgeon in drawing up the plan and monitoring its progress is a salient feature in ensuring the welfare of the animals by promoting co-operation with the producer in order to achieve a given set of goals. Under the Freedom Food Scheme and the Assured British Pigs Scheme, veterinary health plans must be drawn up and regularly updated by the attending veterinary surgeon.

68. In most dairy assurance schemes, the need for a health plan leads to the formulation of a written policy on veterinary care, the use of medicines, biosecurity protocols and procedures in relation to the monitoring of disease and welfare. In addition to day-to-day management of stock, routine vaccination and parasitic control programmes, herd health plans serve to emphasise preventative treatment in

relation to mastitis and lameness and provide a framework for the detection of the early warning signs of disease. The herd health plan required under the National Dairy Assurance Scheme is an important developmental tool which appears to bring about incremental improvements in animal welfare. The responsibility and accountability resulting from the required endorsement of the plan by the veterinary surgeon and the flexibility of individual plans with an incremental approach towards achieving national targets are important elements in ensuring assurance on dairy farms. However, the British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA) herd health plan requires the registration of veterinary surgeons involved in producing plans under this Scheme.

69. Records of lameness, mastitis control and the cell count of milk provide useful indicators of the manner in which dairy cows are being cared for. However, it is recognised that whilst herd health plans are readily accepted in the dairy and pig sectors given the capital investment in stock and the extent of veterinary involvement, their implementation is not so apparent in the beef and sheep sectors. Nevertheless, we believe that herd health plans can play a positive role not only in terms of animal welfare but also in relation to the viability of the enterprise.

Labelling

70. Visits by members of the Working Group to their local supermarkets indicated that a wide range of marketing terms were being used to denote 'assurance' with few providing a definition of what was being assured. In the absence of any definition, it is likely that customers equate 'assurance' to food safety and wholesomeness. There was agreement across the board on the benefits of clear and informative labelling to both producers and consumers. Informative labelling about the welfare provenance of food from farm assured schemes is the key to enabling consumers to knowingly exercise their preferences. So far, achieving a labelling requirement in relation to the method of production in areas other than 'simple' systems such as egg production has not been an easy task because of the difficulties of defining production conditions in a succinct and informative manner. Despite this, we believe that careful thought and effort should be put into devising a system of labelling which is applicable to livestock products. We see labelling as the means whereby farm assurance and the origin and provenance of livestock products can achieve a higher profile in the mind of the consumer, leading to greater consumer awareness and the ability to express preference for particular types of production.

Consistency with respect to imported and domestic products

71. The retailers who gave evidence informed us that the verification procedure applied to their suppliers abroad was equivalent with that applied to suppliers in

this country. However, in general, the procedure appeared to be nothing like as explicit as that given to home producers in that reliance is placed on suppliers abroad conducting their own inspections, with only random audits by the retailers themselves. This aspect is crucial if farm assurance is not to act so as to discriminate against domestic suppliers but to genuinely provide assurance to consumers regarding the provenance of the food they eat. This is an area that we would wish to pursue further in our final report.

Fresh versus processed products

72. We also found that declarations of welfare assurance applied predominantly to fresh livestock products in supermarkets; certainly the retailers made no great effort to highlight the welfare provenance of processed products. The retailers told us that customers were less aware about the welfare provenance of processed or frozen products but we have not been able to verify that assertion. It appears that welfare concerns emerge more strongly where the product can be closely identified with the animal. This is somewhat illogical given that the degree of processing should not obscure the provenance of food. It is also of considerable concern given the high proportion of livestock output sold in processed form.

73. Looking at the impact that the main retailers have had on the farm assurance scene it is not clear whether the retailer schemes were consumer-driven or driven by the retailers based on their perception of consumer demand. What is clear is that those responsible for devising the schemes were in a position to specify and implement higher welfare standards where they chose to do so. The resultant differentiation of products has led to potentially greater consumer choice, and with increasing affluence a large proportion of consumers are in a position to use their purchasing power according to their ethical standpoint.

Food service sector

74. The food service sector appears to have hardly embraced the concept of farm assurance. They are aware of the retailers' experience but with some notable exceptions they insist that they have to be driven by consumer demand, (which they say does not associate animal welfare with the 'eating experience'). This is disturbing since a higher and growing proportion of food expenditure falls into the food service sector and the major supply companies could demonstrate important leadership in terms of providing quality assurance. A few food service organisations are actively using animal welfare criteria as part of their 'branding' and their success will be important in driving the concept of quality assurance in this sector.

Baseline versus quality standard

75. Many we spoke to did not consider farm assurance schemes to be commendable because they largely specified no more than the minimum (legislative/code) standards. Such a disparaging view is not altogether valid from the point of animal welfare given that farm assurance schemes have resulted in greater attention being focused on animal welfare. Even if they did no more than assure minimum welfare standards, the growing influence of regular audits required by farm assurance can only be of benefit in raising awareness and standards. Some schemes do aim to add value in welfare terms; for example, the Freedom Food scheme has been set up with explicit welfare criteria.

Scheme standards of the major retailers

76. Whilst the scheme standards are not openly available, analysis of these standards (Appendix D) has shown that in fact at least half of the schemes do require welfare standards which exceed the requirements of the animal welfare Regulations and the Codes. This is to be welcomed because the retailer standards have the ability to be dynamic, and change rapidly in response to new information, much more so than the regulatory framework.

Swedish system for encouraging high welfare standards

77. An alternative method of assessing stockmanship would be to focus at the end point rather than the process of getting there. We have learned of the Swedish system of linking welfare programmes designed by the dairy, egg, beef and pork industries, to extra payment or reduced payment depending on how well standards are met. It is also worth noting the alternative scenario adopted by the Swedish broiler industry of rewarding producers for achieving high welfare standards through commercial 'rewards' (such as increasing permitted level of stocking density as a reward for meeting higher welfare standards). We will be looking into this area in greater depth in our final report.

FAWC's role in relation to welfare standards in farm assurance schemes

78. It has been suggested that the Council should play a greater role in farm assurance by commenting on the animal welfare aspects of farm assurance schemes. As the Government's independent advisory body on animal welfare FAWC's policy has precluded the endorsement or a close association with any one initiative. We have considered this matter carefully and have come to the conclusion that commenting on individual scheme standards without formally

endorsing them may be construed as tacit approval or disapproval. We therefore feel that we should not adopt such a role as it may compromise our independence, as well as having resource implications which at present we cannot meet.

PART VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

79. In principle, farm assurance schemes, even where the standards do not exceed the animal welfare requirements in the legislation and welfare codes, can represent a step towards better compliance given that livestock producers are voluntarily exposing their production systems to external scrutiny. Schemes have the potential to pursue and enforce desired animal welfare standards provided there is sufficient focus on this aspect throughout the whole assurance process. ***In order to assess the impact of farm assurance on animal welfare we recommend that a greater emphasis is placed on eliciting evidence in the form of welfare compliance on assured farms compared to non-assured farms by expanding the scope of information collected during SVS inspections.*** The provision of detailed information on the underlying reason for non-compliance in SVS reports would provide a means of comparing welfare on farms subject to an assurance scheme with farms outside such schemes. It should also provide a valuable benchmark as to whether or not farm assurance schemes are making a measurable impact in this area.

80. It is widely accepted that assurance schemes are becoming an established part of most livestock production systems, and are seen to have reached a critical mass. Many schemes account for a substantial proportion of UK livestock producers and livestock. The ideal should be for basic farm assurance to encompass all livestock products consumed in the UK. For those producers outside farm assurance schemes, standards of production are not stipulated and there is no benchmark for assessing their standards of welfare. ***We recommend that the Government consider ways of directing future agricultural policy so as to encourage greater participation in farm assurance schemes. If data from SVS inspections demonstrate that welfare compliance on farm assured farms is consistently better than that on non-assured farms, consideration should be given to the closer scrutiny of livestock production units not subject to a recognised farm assurance protocol to ensure that minimum standards are being observed, without any reduction in the resources devoted to enforcement in general.***

81. Whilst standards are not perfect, the discipline of compiling standards and consultation with all interested parties constitutes a valuable learning process which should, in principle, lead to enhanced animal welfare. Research that impinges on animal welfare is of benefit only if it is transmitted to the user community.

Agriculture is a dynamic process and standards need to be reassessed constantly. ***We recommend that research groups seek contact with technical managers responsible for scheme standards and develop a full and open dialogue to ensure that standards are based on science and practical experience rather than perceptions.***

82. Whilst there are existing mechanisms for Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) to draw on scientific expertise, we would encourage TACs to give attention to collation of research and advertise asking for the views of the scientific community when they are due to review standards and make changes. This would enable TACs to access all relevant scientific information when reassessing standards. Such an approach would add value to DEFRA and other Government funded research, given that the industry is increasingly looking to Government to fund research into animal welfare. ***We recommend that more research should be directed towards developing animal welfare indices on farm, in transit and at slaughter.***

83. FAWC has consistently said that stockmanship is a key to good welfare. The difficulty of objective assessment of the quality of stockmanship is apparent in most schemes. More research into developing objective stockmanship and animal welfare indices on farm is essential. ***We recommend that demonstrable stockmanship competence should be an integral part of farm assurance schemes.***

84. The credibility and confidence that can be placed in schemes is dependent on their openness and transparency. It is difficult to reconcile this with the standards of the main retailer schemes only being available to participating producers, confidential to contractual arrangements. ***We recommend that all assurance scheme standards be openly available to all interested parties.***

85. We consider that other wider aspects of scheme standards require further attention and research. ***We recommend that consideration be given, in particular, to the incorporation of scheme standards, which relate to the breeding and rearing of animals for specific production systems, and also the treatment of cull animals at the end of their productive lives.***

86. Informative labelling and the prominence given to farm assurance in the mind of the consumer will enable a firmer declaration of consumer preference. This in turn will encourage suppliers of food products to declare their credentials. The end result would be food assurance, which is driven by the consumer, by the evolution and declaration of consumer preference. We would hope to see this carried through to every sector of the food chain including the food service industry, which can benefit from the experiences of the retail sector. A system of

labelling is required which can be applied to livestock products and is meaningful and informative to consumers. Assurance comes with information and information is best presented via a label, which ultimately becomes synonymous with that particular product. A sound method is required which can be applied to any livestock product. The Council welcomes the emphasis placed on greater co-ordination of labelling policy across Departments and Agencies by the Performance and Innovation Unit (Cabinet Office) in their report on 'Rights of Exchange: Social, Health, Environmental and Trade Objectives on the Global Stage'. *We recommend that careful thought be given to devising and enacting a labelling system appropriate for highlighting the welfare aspects of livestock production systems.*

87. *We recommend that all farm assurance schemes should have access to independent advice on animal welfare and furthermore that scheme owners, in co-operation, establish an independent expert group to inform deliberations on the animal welfare component of all farm assurance standards.*

88. The EC comprehensive negotiating proposal of 14 December 2000 in relation to WTO negotiations on agriculture recommended a number of possible actions to ensure that trade liberalisation does not undermine efforts to improve the protection of the welfare of animals. *We recommend that the Government examine the possibility of 'green box' payments under the Rural Development Programmes for England, Scotland and Wales to meet whatever additional costs might stem directly from the adoption of higher welfare standards.*

CONSULTATION LETTER

27 August 1999

Dear Sir/Madam

THE IMPLICATIONS OF FARM ASSURANCE SCHEMES FOR THE WELFARE OF FARMED LIVESTOCK

1. In its role as an independent advisory body to Agriculture Ministers; the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) has begun a new study, under the chairmanship of Mr John Don, on the implications of farm assurance schemes for the welfare of farmed livestock.

2. The study will include schemes applying to animals on-farm, at market, in transit and at place of slaughter. It will take a holistic approach, focusing on animal welfare, but taking into consideration food safety issues and environmental impact as they relate to animal welfare. Preliminary feedback has indicated that issues of audit, traceability and labelling are likely to be important aspects of this study, as are consumer confidence and public perception of welfare.

3. Whilst it is impossible, at this stage, to identify all aspects of relevance to farm animal welfare, the issues we are likely to address include:

- i) specific welfare objectives underlying the schemes;
- ii) the welfare conditions in individual schemes and the impact of these on husbandry practice;
- iii) auditing, monitoring and enforcement;
- iv) transparency and labelling;
- v) variation between schemes;
- vi) prospects for common, minimum standards;

- vii) the impact of food safety and environmental requirements on animal welfare;
- viii) farmer attitudes;
- ix) consumer perceptions;
- x) potential developments.

4. It is usual for FAWC to conduct a consultation exercise at an early stage and my purpose in writing is to seek your organisation's view as we commence our study. Please feel free to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of current practices, schemes and legislation. We would also appreciate it if those responsible for such schemes could provide us with any scheme literature and documentation. We hope to gather information from overseas as well as the UK. All this information will be confidential to FAWC.

5. In addition to this consultation letter, we may write to some organisations with specific questions as work progresses. Some may also be invited to discussions with the group. Normally FAWC reports list the names of the organisations that gave evidence. Should you prefer to be excluded from the list, please let me know when you reply.

6. If you believe there are any important omissions from the list of consultees, I should be obliged if you would let me have the name and address of an appropriate contact.

7. FAWC thanks you for your co-operation and looks forward to receiving your comments by 29 October 1999 or earlier if possible.

Yours faithfully



Paul McDonald
Assistant Secretary

APPENDIX B

THOSE WHO GAVE EVIDENCE AND ASSISTANCE

Alpha Flight Catering
Animal Welfare, Science, Ethics & Law Veterinary Association
ASDA Group plc
Assured British Meats
Assured British Pigs
Assured Chicken Production
Assured Food Standards
Brake Brothers (Catering)
Brewers & Licensed Retailers
British Airways Global (Catering)
British Cattle Veterinary Association
British Deer Farmers' Association
British Egg Industry Council
British Goat Society
British Meat Manufacturers Association
British Poultry Meat Federation
British Veterinary Association Animal Welfare Foundation
British Veterinary Poultry Association
Cig Môn Cymru Limited
Consumers' Association
Co-operative Wholesale Society
Dairy Industry Federation
Danish Bacon and Meat Council
Dutch Meat Board
Farm Animal Welfare Network
Farm Assured British Beef and Lamb
Farmers' Union of Wales
Food Commission
Food Standards Agency
Freedom Food Limited
Gate Gourmet (Catering)
Golden Vale
J Sainsbury plc
Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards
Leeds Institute for Plant Biotechnology and Agriculture
Livestock Auctioneers Association
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute, The
Marks and Spencer plc

McDonald's
Meat and Livestock Commission
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
National Beef Association
National Council of Women of Great Britain
National Dairy Farm Assurance Scheme Limited
National Farmers' Union
National Farmers' Union of Scotland
National Federation of Consumer Groups
National Office of Animal Health Limited
National Pig Association
National Proficiency Tests Council
National Sheep Association
National Townswomen's Guild
Ovasort Limited
Political Animals
Prairie Swine Centre Inc., Canada
Quality Meats Scotland
Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Safeway plc
Sainsbury plc
Scotch Quality Beef and Lamb Association Limited
Scottish Agricultural College
Scottish Food Quality Certification Limited
Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Silsoe Research Institute
Soil Association
Somersfield Stores Limited
Sustain
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Tesco Stores plc
Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
United Kingdom Accreditation Service
University of Bristol
University of Glasgow
University of Leeds
University of Newcastle
Vega Research
Waitrose Limited
Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Limited
Whitbread plc

GLOSSARY

ABM	Assured British Meats
AB Pigs	Assured British Pigs
ACP	Assured Chicken Production
AFS	Assured Food Standards
AWSELVA	Animal Welfare, Science, Ethics and Law Veterinary Association
BCVA	British Cattle Veterinary Association
BEIC	British Egg Industry Council
BSE	Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, a slowly progressive and ultimately fatal neurological disorder of adult cattle.
CMI	Checkmate International
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
E Coli 0157	Escherichia coli which cause a range of symptoms from mild diarrhoea to severe colitis.
EA	European Co-operation for Accreditation
EEC	European Economic Community
EFA	European Food Authority
EFSIS	European Food Safety Inspection Service
EN 45004	European Standard for Inspection Bodies
EN 45011	European Standard for Product Certification
EU	European Union
EUREP	Euro Retailer Produce Working Group
FABBL	Farm Assured British Beef and Lamb
FASL	Farm Assured Scottish Lamb
FAWC	Farm Animal Welfare Council
FAWL	Farm Assured Welsh Lamb
FFB	Food from Britain
FIS	Farm Inspection Service
FSA	Food Standards Agency
GAP	Good Agricultural Practice
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foods
MLC	Meat and Livestock Commission
NFU	National Farmers' Union
PAI	Product Authentication Inspectorate
QMS	Quality Meat Scotland
QWFCL	Quality Welsh Food Certification Ltd
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SFQC	Scottish Food Quality Certification Limited

SPII	Scottish Pig Industry Initiative
SSPCA	Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SVS	State Veterinary Service
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
UKAS	United Kingdom Accreditation Service
UKFQC	United Kingdom Food Quality Certification
UKROFS	United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards
WTO	World Trade Organisation

APPENDIX D

A STUDY OF THE DEGREE AND EXTENT TO WHICH ANIMAL WELFARE IS PRIORITISED WITHIN THE RETAILER SCHEMES.

Background

This study is focused on the assurance schemes in use by retailers, many of whom, during the 1990's, developed their own individual schemes, and perceived a marketing advantage by so doing. There was initial reluctance by some retailers to release scheme details, on the grounds of commercial sensitivity, but sufficient information was eventually obtained to form the basis for this study.

Objectives

The objective of this study was to ascertain whether assurance schemes were effective in improving animal welfare. It was not an exhaustive study of every scheme standard compared with the law, which would be a major task. It should therefore be used for indicative purposes only. One particular limitation was the amount of material supplied by the participating retailers. Some only submitted very basic information and it may be that their full standards have not been included in the study.

Method

A consultation letter announcing a new study of the implications of farm assurance schemes on the welfare of farmed livestock was sent to some 9 retailers, associated trade associations and other interested parties on 27th August 1999. Responses to the initial letter were received from four retailers. This letter was followed by a series of visits to the major retailers to either obtain, or expand on their response. During those meetings retailers were asked for copies of their own technical standards for in-house assurance schemes, and seven stores were willing to release these details on a confidential basis, after assurances had been given about confidentiality to the FAWC working group.

There were three fundamental questions to be answered in this study:-

How comprehensive were the schemes?

How important was welfare in the individual schemes?

Did standards exceed the baseline requirements of UK law?

Scheme standards were studied in the following way. The total number of standards were counted, to give an impression of the scope of the scheme. Individual standards were then scrutinised for their relevance to welfare, and the proportion of standards relating to welfare calculated. Whether (or not) the standards related to welfare, food safety etc. was decided impartially by one observer, using a consistent approach throughout. This gave some idea of the relative importance of welfare in the retailer schemes.

Individual standards were also compared with the Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock (published by the former MAFF), to ascertain whether they exceeded the welfare requirements of the codes. Each standard was assigned to one of three categories – **None** (no standards exceeding the legislative requirement), **Some** (less than 5 standards exceeding the requirements) and **Yes** (more than 5 standards clearly exceeding the requirements). This answered the final question of whether farm assurance schemes actually made any contribution to farm animal welfare reform above and beyond the legislative framework.

Results

The results are shown in the following table:

- The size of the various schemes varied widely. The overall number of standards ranged from 22 to 314.
- On average just over half of all technical standards related to welfare (54.5%) but there was a wide range between retailers, from 23.7% – 76.5%.
- Three of the retailer schemes showed clear evidence of exceeding the codes. B appeared to be working to the codes of practice, but C and D showed some evidence of standards exceeding the codes of practice. A, E and G, however had several (more than 5) standards which were higher than those set out in the code.
- Of the last three the mean proportion of standards relating to welfare were A – 67.6%, E – 62.7%, and G – 58.1%. A showed the greatest emphasis on welfare, and their standards also reflected their interest in quality. Retailer G standards also reflected their interest in responsible environmental management.

Conclusion

Half of the retailer schemes showed clear evidence of going beyond the requirements of UK law. Even for those whose standards only reflected this baseline, the audit requirements of retailer farm assurance schemes should ensure that the law is not broken. This would support the efforts of the authorities to enforce all UK farm animal production.

Retailer Code	Species Standards supplied	Number of standards	Number Relating to welfare	Percentage relating to welfare	Beyond the regulatory requirements	Examples					
A	Lamb	69	43	62.3	Yes	No goads, maximum 8 hours journey time, specified stocking densities for transport and housing					
	Beef	69	36	52.2	Yes						
	Free Range Eggs	177	127	71.2	Yes						
	Chickens	116	83	71.6	Yes						
	Turkeys	81	62	76.5	Yes						
	Fresh pork	115	73	63.5	Yes						
						No goads on farm, Veterinary Health Plan, no nose ringing, outdoor sows at maximum 10 per acre, no farrowing rails, no full slats, extra space, twice a day feeding, precise water requirements (both volume and flow rate)					
B	All species	76	18	23.7	No						
C	Cattle Sheep Pigs Transport Markets Slaughter Stunning	148	113	76.3	Some	No castration in pigs					
D	Beef						22	10	45.5		No goads
	Lamb						27	12	44.0		
	Pigs						134	68	50.7	Some	Maximum 8 hours transport, no markets, no goads
E	Dairy Cows						187	121	64.7	Yes	Maximum 8 hours transport, no ritual slaughter, herd welfare plan
	Eggs						314	183	58.3	Yes	
	Broilers						313	192	61.3	Yes	
	Pigs	247	150	60.7	Yes	Herd welfare plan					
	Medicines	31	5	16.1	Yes						
	Lamb	302	212	70.2	Yes						
	Turkeys	306	182	59.5	Yes						
	Beef	269	189	70.2	Yes	No goads or sticks, welfare plan, maximum 8 hours transport, calves and culls slaughtered within 4 hours					

Retailer Code	Species Standards supplied	Number of standards	Number Relating to welfare	Percentage relating to welfare	Beyond the regulatory requirements	Examples
F	All species	47	23	48.9	No	
G	Premium Beef	141	74	52.4	Yes	Health plan, no ritual slaughter
	Sheep	132	70	53.0	Yes	
	Outdoor pigs	154	74	48.0	Yes	No nose rings, castration, markets, swill or human food by-products. Maximum 8 hour journey time, and 1.5 times minimum finishing space allowance
	Free Range Hens	84	67	79.8	Yes	
	Laying hens	73	54	74.0	Yes	
	Free Range chickens	26	17	65.4	Yes	
	Dairy	142	84	59.1	Yes	Herd health plan, Diet plan, dehorning only by vet, vehicles plated for stocking density, all animals to be stunned, no ritual slaughter
	Broilers/ Breeders	223	126	56.5	Yes	

APPENDIX E

MEMBERSHIP OF THE FARM ANIMAL WELFARE COUNCIL AUGUST 2001

Dr Judy MacArthur Clark (*Chairwoman*)

Mr Ian Baker

Mrs Rosemary Berry

Professor Stephen Clark

Mr John Don

Professor Peter English

Mr Graham Godbold

Mr Tony Gray

Dr Jane Guise

Mr Eddie Harper

Mr David Henderson

Ms Victoria Hird

Mr James Hook

Professor Alistair Lawrence

Mr Stephen Lister

Mr Gareth Lloyd

Mr Richard Maunder

Professor John McInerney, OBE

Miss Miriam Parker

Dr Martin Potter

Mrs Barbara Smith

Mrs Josephine Turnbull JP

Mr Michael Vaughan

FARM ANIMAL WELFARE COUNCIL: INTERIM REPORT ON THE ANIMAL WELFARE IMPLICATIONS OF FARM ASSURANCE SCHEMES

This interim report looks at the general framework of farm assurance schemes to see if they are capable of delivering assurance on the welfare standards under which farm animals are kept. It discusses the key issues that have emerged so far; indicates areas to be studied in more depth; and makes some recommendations, primarily to stimulate the review and development of the animal welfare component of assurance scheme standards and to improve communication to the consumer.

DEFRA

Department for
**Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs**

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