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QUALITATIVE STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE MONITORING SYSTEMS FOR FARM ANIMAL WELFARE

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ABSTRACT. Continued concern for animal welfare may be alleviated when welfare would be monitored on farms. Monitoring can be characterized as an information system where various stakeholders periodically exchange relevant information. Stakeholders include producers, consumers, retailers, the government, scientists, and others. Valuating animal welfare in the animal-product market chain is regarded as a key challenge to further improve the welfare of farm animals and information on the welfare of animals must, therefore, be assessed objectively, for instance, through monitoring. Interviews with Dutch stakeholder representatives were conducted to identify their perceptions about the monitoring of animal welfare. Stakeholder perceptions were characterized in relation to the specific perspectives of each stakeholder. While producers tend to perceive welfare from a production point of view, consumers will use visual images derived from traditional farming and from the animals' natural environments. Scientists' perceptions of animal welfare are affected by the need to measure welfare with quantifiable parameters. Retailers and governments (policy makers) have views of welfare that are derived from their relationships with producers, consumers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and scientists. All interviewed stakeholder representatives stated that animal welfare is important. They varied in the extent to which they weighted economic considerations relative to concern for the animals' welfare. Many stakeholders emphasized the importance of communication in making a monitoring system work. Overall, the perspectives for the development of a sustainable monitoring system that substantially improves farm animal welfare were assessed as being poor in the short term. However, a reliable system could be initiated under certain conditions, such as integrated chains and with influential and motivated stakeholders. A scheme is described with attention points for the development of sustainable monitoring systems for farm animal welfare in the long term.

KEY WORDS: animal welfare assessment, housing and management systems, monitoring, on-farm, stakeholder analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

In last decades the production-efficiency has been improved considerably. With intensified livestock production, societal concern for animal welfare has also increased. In an attempt to solve this ethical problem, several
strategies may be taken. Many governments, including the Dutch government, have tried to improve animal welfare with legislation, but this has not fully succeeded. Recent developments (e.g., the Freedom Food scheme being adopted by Tesco in the UK) have indicated that more progress may be made when stakeholders in the production chain take up the responsibilities to improve animal welfare. In order to make the required ethical decisions, stakeholders need reliable information about animal welfare. Present-day policy in the Netherlands (LNV, 2002; Report Wijffels, 2001) aims to improve animal welfare, and reduce the societal concern, using market forces and a welfare index or monitoring system for animal welfare.

The sector developed initiatives to monitor animal welfare. In the Netherlands, for instance, “Keten Kwaliteit Melk” and the “DierVeiligheidsIndex” (SKOVAR, later incorporated into IKB 2003 for pigs) did so, whereas abroad, for instance, the “Tiergerechtigkeitsindex” (Austria, Germany), the “Swine Welfare Assurance Program” (National Pork Board, USA) and the “Freedom Food Label” (RSPCA, UK) could be mentioned. Initiatives to develop monitoring systems have often been met with resistance. In the different parts of the chain, a large number of actors are involved in the production of food products of animal origin. Stakeholders include banks, feed-suppliers, system designers, producers, meat processors, the food industry, retailers, consumers, policy makers, and scientists. These stakeholders may have different interests and different views about how animal welfare should be monitored. Objections to monitoring systems concern mainly that the system is either not valid(ated) or that it is not feasible.

Research at several places, therefore, pays attention to monitoring animal welfare on livestock farms, not only at the national, but also at the European level. Although for many years biological research on animal welfare has been conducted, only recently the importance of the perceptions of consumers and other stakeholders in the chain has been recognized. At this stage, however, knowledge is lacking about specific objectives of different social actors or stakeholders, and thus about their demands for the monitoring of animal welfare at livestock farms. Since stakeholder acceptance may be a bottleneck for the realization of sustainable monitoring systems for farm animal welfare, information is needed about the stakeholders’ demands and worries as well as about opportunities and strengths of welfare monitoring.

This paper aims to specify stakeholder perceptions and attitudes towards the monitoring of animal welfare. To this end, we conducted a qualitative stakeholder analysis, including a conceptual analysis of our own perceptions (about stakeholder perceptions) and interviews with important stakeholder groups, namely producers, retailers, the government (policy-makers), con-