



HOW TO EVALUATE RDP CONTRIBUTIONS TO ANIMAL WELFARE: EXPERIENCES FROM GERMANY

FACTSHEET OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION HELPDESK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT - JUNE 2019



IMPROVING CONDITIONS FOR ANIMALS IN EUROPE

Animal welfare is increasingly becoming a recognised and priority topic of the EU's agriculture policy and of its long-term sustainability. The EU rural development policy provides direct support for animal welfare through Measure 14, granting of payments to carry out operations covering one or more commitments that go beyond the relevant mandatory standards for animal welfare. Rural development programmes (RDPs) can further contribute to animal welfare through other measures, such as Measure 1: Knowledge transfer and information actions or Measure 4: Investments in physical assets.

Different methodologies, indicators, and data can be used for the evaluation of RDP's contributions to animal welfare. Those Member States who have assessed this topic have done so in different ways, including using additional evaluation elements (e.g. programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators) as well as through the collection of further monitoring and evaluation data to assess the RDP's effects.

This factsheet sheds light on the methodology used in the ongoing thematic evaluation carried out in five German federal states. The evaluation has already been conducted by the Thünen-Institute of Farm Economics in the programming period 2007-2013 and is again being carried out for the 2014-2020 RDPs.



ONGOING EVALUATION OF ANIMAL WELFARE IN FIVE GERMAN FEDERAL STATES

Ongoing evaluation background

The Thünen-Institute has been jointly contracted by five federal states (Lower-Saxony, Bremen, North-Rhine-Westphalia, Hesse and Schleswig-Holstein) for the RDP evaluation, including animal welfare.

The measures which have the goal of improving animal welfare or are likely to have effects on animal welfare in these five federal states are:

- Investments in Physical Assets (Farm Investment Support M04.1),



FURTHER INFORMATION

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Evaluation reports on the RDPs' effects on animal welfare payments in Lower Saxony:

- for pigs: https://literatur.thuenen.de/digbib_extern/dn060830.pdf;
- laying hens: https://literatur.thuenen.de/digbib_extern/dn060829.pdf

Welfare Quality® Protocols:

- <http://www.welfarequalitynetwork.net/en-us/reports/assessment-protocols/>

Reports from the RDP 2007-2013 on dairy cows:

- https://literatur.thuenen.de/digbib_extern/dn057541.pdf



- Animal Welfare Payments (M14),
- EIP groups (M16.1, M16.2),
- Knowledge transfer and advisory services (M01 and M02) and
- Organic agriculture (M11).

As the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2014-2020 does not provide common questions for the assessment of animal welfare effects of the RDP, an ad hoc evaluation framework has been developed by the evaluator and discussed with the Ministry for Agriculture of each respective federal state. Evaluation results are discussed with the ministry as well as different stakeholders such as farm advisors and Paying Agencies.

The evaluation framework entails two separate, but interconnected analyses:

1. a 'bottom up' analysis of animal welfare effects of individual measures which looks to identify as many effects as possible of a single measure for a single federal state by using surveys;
2. a 'top-down' approach which uses specific indicators (i.e. mortality) to find out the influence of each RDP measure. Secondary data is used to compare federal states for this purpose.

Methodology

For the assessment of the RDP's effects on animal welfare, measures with both primary and secondary contributions were considered (i.e. animal welfare payments, investments in physical assets, EIP AGRI Operational Groups, training and farm advisory services).¹

First, the evaluator carried out a literature review to compare the specifications included in the RDP measures (i.e. stocking density/floor space per animal requirements) with the corresponding research findings from the literature (space necessary to carry out natural behaviour).

Second, while welfare assessment at the level of individual animals are generally considered to be the most robust means to provide reliable information, they are also very difficult to be applied with limited resources and financial constraints, which makes their application often not possible. Therefore, an alternative solution in the case of these five federal states was applied in the form of structured written surveys, which were used to gather information on the 'changes' the farmers carried out to participate in the two measures 'animal welfare payments' (M14) and 'investments in physical assets' (M04.1). While this information cannot provide an assessment of the actual state of animal welfare on the farms at the individual animal level, it can provide useful insights and a proxy indication of the effects of the support measures and the windfall gains associated with its implementation.

Data collection (written survey) was carried out in 2017 for M14 (fattening pigs), 2018 for M14 (laying hens) and M04.1 (all livestock). All farms participating in the measures received the questionnaire and the rate of return varied between 68%-88%, depending on the measure and the federal state (questions included 'mortality rate', '% of pigs with injured tails', etc.).²

The structure of the farms who returned the questionnaires were compared with averages of all supported farms to check for biases. The farms participating in the survey were on average representative for the sum of the supported farms. For measure M04.1, a combined questionnaire was developed with the evaluators in charge of the assessment of the economic effects of the measure.

Main results

The analysis of the 2018 survey results of measure M04.1 for all five federal states have not yet been published. Therefore, only

the results of the M14 evaluation for Lower-Saxony for 2017 and 2018 are presented.

The written survey showed that the measures administrative implementation was successful, which was apparent based on the farmers responses of satisfaction with the information provided by the ministry (concerning pigs and laying hens) and the trainings received (only relevant for pigs). Suggestions for improvements include simplifications of the forms related to the application/selection procedure, as well as, forms concerning animal wellbeing used by farmers and veterinary staff. Additionally, suggestions have been made to better define a number of indicators (i.e. mortality and intact tail).



The results further show that while the measure supporting pig welfare can be broadly regarded as useful, the laying hen measure has not been successful in improving animal welfare on the supported farms assessed. The reasons for this are primarily high windfall gains (only 14% of the participating farms had to implement changes), a high prevalence of feather picking and high mortalities on the supported farms. One important evaluation recommendation stemming from this study is the suggestion to include result-oriented indicators into the laying hen measure to improve its performance for the future.

A conclusion of the study highlights that although the pig measure has been more successful in providing welfare-friendly animal husbandry on the supported farms, it has not solved the problem of tail docking. This appears to be primarily due to the limited number of participants supported by the measure (around 3% of farms and 2% of animals in Lower-Saxony). In Lower-Saxony, about 5,000 farms produce 4.2 million fattening pigs. A majority of these farms operate conventionally and keep pigs with docked tails. If all of these farms are to abandon tail-docking via this support measure, this would require more than half of the public funds available for the RDP in Lower-Saxony. Therefore, a more stringent enforcement of the existing legal frameworks, both at the EU and national levels, would be a more effective instrument to change farming practices. In order to avoid distortions in competitiveness between countries, a common approach between EU Member States would be the best solution.



CHALLENGES AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

MAJOR CHALLENGES:

The application of a counterfactual methodology capable of comparing animal welfare between supported and non-supported farms is difficult because the access to data of non-beneficiaries is restricted due to data protection regulations (only supported farms have agreed to the use of farm data for evaluation).

The collection of animal-based indicators (e.g. using the internationally accepted Welfare Quality® Protocols) is too costly for evaluation.

There is a general lack of updated, harmonised, and accessible data on animal welfare.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

This study recommends that in the future, data related to animal welfare is collected not only from beneficiaries of M14 (M04.1, M11, M01, M02, M16), but also from those receiving support of other relevant CAP interventions. This means that existing farm data should be accessible for evaluation purposes (e.g. IACS, FADN, System of Permanent Identification of Individual Bovine Animals).

If possible, evaluators should try to find synergies with relevant research projects, in which funds were granted for the application of more robust data collection tools related to animal welfare (e.g. the Welfare Quality® Protocol)(see 'Further Information' above).

Animal-based data collected for sanitary controls and slaughtering are very useful for the evaluation (e.g. mortality rate, vitality, diseases). It is important to make this data accessible to evaluators.



Send your questions to:

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¹ Evaluation studies for the two measures 'animal welfare payments (M14)' and 'investments in physical assets (M04.1)' have already been completed, while the evaluation of the effects of animal welfare on the other measures and the comparison analysis of different federal states will be undertaken in the coming years.

² One of the questions in the survey which was used to assess windfall gains was: 'Which changes did you have to implement on your farm to be able to participate in the measure?' The farms were also asked about their housing system ('which kind of housing system do you have for your fattening pigs?' a) fully slatted floors, b) partially slatted floors c) solid floor. Do you use straw litter [yes/no]? If "yes", in which areas of the housing?) The incidence of tail biting was sampled with the following questions: 'Does tail biting occur on your farm?' If "yes" please indicate the share of pigs affected by tail-biting <10 %, 10-<20 %, 20-<30 %, 30-<40 %, 40-<50 %, 50 % and more.'

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