Check for updates

Editorial: Animal welfare labelling

Mara Miele[1]* and Harry Blokhuis[2]

[1]Cardiff University, School of Geography and Planning, Glamorgan Building, Wales, United Kingdom, [2]Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Animal Environment and Health, Uppsala, Sweden

Editorial on the Research Topic
Animal welfare labelling

Food labels are important tools through which a vast number of consumers, particularly those accustomed to purchasing food in supermarkets, understand and appreciate the qualities of foods (Evans and Miele, 2017). Labels qualify foods with much information and, increasingly, they communicate the ethical status of animal products with qualifications such as organic, free range, cruelty-free or other descriptions related to the animal friendliness of the production method. Evans and Miele (2017) propose that ethical food labels function as '*icons*', that represent specific types of food and food production relations, to bridge the gap between producers and consumers. However, in the European Union, claims about the welfare of farm animals are not regulated and the market for animal foods lacks transparency. In this context, there are many doubts about the ability of labels to increase transparency in the market (Tregidga et al., 2019). This special issue addresses current challenges and opportunities for animal welfare labelling in Europe.

Ingenbleek and Krampe in their paper '*The end of animal welfare labelling as we know it? Persisting problems at the consumer level and PLF-based solutions*' argue that the effectiveness of animal welfare labels is hampered by a number of issues including consumers' lack of trust, the abundance of food labels and the confusion that they generate, the discrepancy between consumers understanding of animal welfare, often couched under the term natural or organic, and what the animal welfare standards actually address (see Miele et al., 2011; Miele, 2011 and Miele and Pinducciu, 2001), the limited innovation in Animal Welfare labelling and the higher prices of animal friendly certified products. Based on a consumer study in four European countries, *Paul T. Ingenbleek and Caspar Krampe* argue that though attitudes might vary between countries and consumer groups, these issues persist and current labels will not be able to significantly affect the market. The paper then explores other avenues, including the potential of the data generated with precision livestock farming and e-commerce technologies. These authors propose to extend current data use to reach consumers. They identify the pre- and post-purchase stages as overlooked areas of intervention and argue that innovative technologies can assist consumers in indicating their preferences, as

well as receive feedback on the production process and offer new insights for more effective labelling strategies.

The paper by Stygar et al., entitled '*How far are we from data-driven and animal-based welfare assessment? A critical analysis of European quality schemes*' starts by acknowledging that there is a plethora of labelling schemes that provide consumers with a range of information about the welfare of farm animals. Stygar et al. firstly quantified and identified 19 standards for certification: nine for dairy and ten for pig production, led by twelve industry-wide quality schemes, from eight European countries: Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and Spain. These standards use the Welfare Quality protocols (Blokhuis et al., 2013) and monitored the (on farm) welfare of pigs and dairy cattle by comparing outcome-based, resource and management-based measures. Secondly, they described how the data produced was used along the value chain for animal welfare assessments.

The analysis shows that only 5 standards, out of 19, were using predominantly animal-based measures as indicated and defined in WQ®, and the other schemes used environment rather than animal-based measures.

The results of this study suggest that the quality schemes could be improved by broadening the utilization of data generated along the value chain, as only one of the analysed schemes used sensor technologies for offering information about animal welfare.

Also, the paper '*Time-Consuming, but Necessary: A Wide Range of Measures Should Be Included in Welfare Assessments for Dairy Herds*' by Collins et al., looks at current animal welfare protocols for assessing the welfare of farm animals. They argue that outcome based measures of animal welfare, comprising health and behaviour, have been proved to be valid, however they are time consuming and this is the main limit to their adoption in current certification schemes. These authors explored the possibility of reducing the measures included and compared two approaches: 'pairwise associations' between measures and summary measures—"iceberg indicators"—of dairy herd welfare that could predict herd welfare status. They analysed the results of these approaches in 51 English farms, in total 96 welfare outcome measures were assessed in those farms. They identified only some 'weak' correlation but insufficient to provide adequate information about dairy cows' welfare, and concluded that many diverse measures are still necessary.

The paper by Rowe et al., '*Rationale for Defining Recognition of "Higher Animal Welfare" Farm Assurance Schemes in a Global Food System: The GAWA Alliance*' investigated the rationale for establishing a recognised network of higher welfare schemes from which 'authentic' higher welfare products could be purchased. The study underlined the absence of standard equivalence of different animal welfare certification schemes the results of the analysis of nine schemes and seven food companies confirmed the difficulties food businesses encounter in international trade. This study point to the need for an agreement among those assurance schemes aiming at a higher level of animal welfare to specify standardisation of recognised measures as a solution to this impasse, and proposed practical changes to the current "Global Animal Welfare Assurance" (GAWA).

We believe this special issue provides interesting reading for scientists in the area but also for interested stakeholders, policymakers and students.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

Blokhuis, H., Miele, M., Veissier, I., and Jones, B. (2013). *Improving farm animal welfare science and society working together: the welfare quality approach* (Wageningen (NL: Wageningen Academic Publisher).

Evans, A., and Miele, M. (2017). "Food labelling as a response to political consumption: effects and contradictions," in *The routledge handbook in consumption*. Eds. M. Keller, B. Halkier, T.-A. Wilska and M. Truninger (London &New York: Routledge), (191–204).

Miele, M. (2011). The taste of happiness: free-range chicken. *Environ. Plann. A* 43 (9), 2070–2090. doi: 10.1068/a43257

Miele, M., and Pinducciu, D. (2001). A market for nature: Linking the production and consumption of organics in Tuscany. *J. Environ. Policy Plann. N.* 3, 149–162. doi: 10.1002/jepp.78

Miele, M., Veissier, I., Evans, A., and Botreau, R. (2011). Animal welfare: Establishing a dialogue between science and society. *Anim. Welfare* 20, 103–117.

Tregidga, H., Kearins, K., and Collins, E. (2019). Towards transparency? analysing the sustainability governance practices of ethical certification. *Soc. Environ. Accountability J.* 39 (1), 44–69. doi: 10.1080/0969160X.2019.1568276