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“Solidarity in a competing world —  
fair use of resources”

## Assessing and Improving Animal Welfare on Mexican Dairy Farms

RAHEL ZIEGLER<sup>1</sup>, JAN GRENZ<sup>2</sup>, PEDRO ROGELIO AGUIRRE JOCHIN<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH), School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL), Switzerland*

<sup>2</sup>*Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH), School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL), Switzerland*

<sup>3</sup>*Nestlé, Group Mexico, Mexico*

### Abstract

Livestock husbandry depends on the wellbeing of the animal to be productive. Through technical industrialisation in agriculture this initial concept was levered and not questioned by society and politics until the 1960s, when the concept of the five freedoms arose and built the base for animal protection laws in many countries. This is also the case in Switzerland and Mexico. Switzerland has one of the strictest animal protection laws worldwide and can therefore serve as a benchmark for a Swiss dairy processor willing to improve farm animal welfare of their Mexican dairy suppliers. This is the objective of our study. For the investigative survey, 61 farms throughout all Mexican climate zones were visited and assessed during the rainy season. Data collection was done using a structured questionnaire and the evaluation was mainly descriptive. Main animal welfare concerns were found with regard to (1) structural or input-based indicators concerning (a) lack of sun protection (shelter), (b) poor state of the underground especially during the rainy season, (c) risk locations, where cattle can get hurt, and (d) qualitative and quantitative issues about drinking water supply; (2) animal-based indicators or behavioural expressions showing poor animal welfare concerning (e) feeding (selecting feed), (f) resting (too many cows standing around, i.e. not wanting to lie down), (g) locomotion (indicating poor claw health), and (h) lesions (neck, fewer hocks). Overall, farmers claimed that animal welfare was important for them. However it was not possible to make a statement on whether the detected issues concern all dairy farms selling their milk to the Swiss milk processor. Nevertheless, there are some more or less simple and cheap and therefore mostly feasible solutions for the dairy farmers to encounter the mentioned concerns.

**Keywords:** Dairy production, farm animal welfare, Mexico, sustainability