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Assessing the feasibility of applying the welfare quality® assessment protocol for dairy cows on farms in Kiruhura District, Uganda

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Abstract

Welfare Quality® assessment protocols have been used extensively in Europe to assess welfare of livestock for research or policy objectives, however, their applicability to production systems in Uganda has not been examined. The aim of this research was to assess the feasibility of applying the welfare quality® assessment protocol (designed for production systems in the European Union) for dairy cows on extensive farms in Kiruhura District, Uganda. In this study, the protocol was tested on 24 dairy farms (herd sizes ranged from 15 to 125 cows) randomly selected from 6 sub counties in Kiruhura district over two visits. The first visit was early in the morning (6:30 am) during milking and another in the afternoon (2:00 pm) during grazing. Each of the assessments lasted for about an hour. The visit in the morning included a questionnaire-guided interview to evaluate the care, management and health, and animal welfare attributes of the cows when they were still in the ban. The second visit in the afternoon assessed farm resources, stockman ship and environment in which the cows graze. Overall, 1256 cows were assessed and 24 farm managers interviewed. The assessment captured measures to be retained without modification (for example assessing absence of hunger by using rumen fill score or body condition score), measures retained with slight modification (for example when assessing absence of prolonged thirst, the method of assessment was modified from 'How far animals must walk to access water?' to 'Does the farm have a watering point?') and eliminating unsuitable measures (for example assessing baulking, running and stumbling could not be assessed because animals move in large open spaces). The study showed that not all measures are feasible for on-farm assessment among extensive dairy farms in Kiruhura, district, Uganda as only 27 measures were found practical. Therefore, adaptation of existing protocols and setting of acceptable and non-acceptable thresholds tailored to local production systems for each of the identified measures are necessary to enhance adoption of the existing protocol.

Keywords: Extensive dairy production systems, feasibility, Uganda, welfare quality assessment protocol

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