

FARM ASSURANCE SCHEMES & ANIMAL WELFARE

How the standards compare
2012



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consumers are increasingly concerned about the welfare of food-producing animals. However, a lack of clear information on the welfare standards for the animals used in the production of different products is a significant barrier to ethical purchasing and consumer choice.

It is not surprising that consumers are confused by the labelling of animal products. Most animals farmed in the UK are reared in accordance with the standards of farm assurance schemes, all of which claim to ensure high standards of animal welfare, yet vary greatly in their requirements for how animals are kept and cared for. This analysis looks in detail at the welfare standards of the major farm assurance schemes in England and Scotland to see how they compare to each other and to standard industry practice¹.

The schemes included in the analysis are Assured Food Standards (AFS)² (including Assured British Pigs (ABP), Assured British Meat (ABM), Assured Dairy Farms (ADF), Assured Chicken Production (ACP), Quality British Turkey (QBT)), the British Lion Quality Code of Practice (Lion Code), the Code of Good Practice for Scottish Finfish Aquaculture (CoGP), Quality Meat Scotland (QMS), RSPCA Freedom Food (RSPCA), the Scottish Organic Producers Association (SOPA), and the Soil Association (SA).

Measuring animal welfare

Animal welfare refers to the well-being of the individual animal. It includes animal health and encompasses both the physical and psychological state of the animal. The welfare of an animal can be described as good or high if the individual is fit, healthy and has a good quality of life, which encompasses both freedom from suffering and the opportunity to experience positive feelings of well-being.

Legislation should aim to ensure that all farmed animals are given a life worth living. Assurance schemes can play an important role in promoting welfare standards above the legal minimum, giving consumers the confidence to buy meat, milk and eggs knowing that the animals have had a good life.

Welfare can be poor in any farming system if stockmanship is poor. However, systems vary in their potential to provide good welfare. Even if stockmanship is good, welfare is likely to be poor in confinement systems that severely restrict freedom of movement or in barren overcrowded conditions that limit behavioural expression.

A farming system that provides for behavioural freedom without compromising health can be described as having high welfare potential. Major concerns for animal welfare arise from farming systems with low welfare potential, i.e. those that fail to meet the behavioural and physical needs of the animal and are therefore likely to cause suffering. The ability of a system to provide good welfare is determined by factors that are built into the system, such as provision of sufficient living space and access to resources that meet the needs of the animals.

Whilst it is essential to set high input standards to ensure livestock production systems have high welfare potential, it is also important to monitor welfare outcomes (such as mortality, disease, lameness, injuries and the occurrence of normal and abnormal behaviours) to assess the extent to which that potential is realised. Welfare outcomes reflect the overall performance of the system, which will be influenced both by the welfare potential of the system and by the level of human management skill applied to it.

Methodology

The schemes were analysed on their performance on a range of criteria grouped into five sets as follows:

- Environment (referring to the animals' environment)
- Husbandry
- Stockmanship, handling, transport & slaughter
- Genetics & breeding
- Auditing.

The selected criteria were largely based on the input standards considered necessary to meet the 'Five Freedoms' and incorporate specific

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'standard industry practice' refers to the minimum welfare standards commonly adopted within the UK farming industry. This is largely defined by minimum legislative requirements but also incorporates i. common practices that may not meet minimum legal requirements (e.g. routine tail docking in pigs), and ii. practices adopted by a majority of producers that may go beyond minimum legal requirements (e.g. castration of male pigs is not commonly performed in the UK although it is permitted by legislation).

² The following schemes have recently changed their names (ABP): Red Tractor Farm Assurance Pigs Scheme; (ABM): Red Tractor Farm Assurance Beef and Lamb Scheme; (ADF): Red Tractor Farm Assurance Dairy Scheme, and (ACP): Red Tractor Farm Assurance Poultry Scheme.

key welfare issues identified for each species from the scientific literature. The 'Five Freedoms' were developed by the UK Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) and have been widely used as a framework for animal welfare legislation and assurance scheme standards.

The Five Freedoms

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst

by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour

2. Freedom from discomfort

by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area

3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease

by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment

4. Freedom to express normal behaviour

by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind

5. Freedom from fear & distress

by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

The importance of measuring and monitoring welfare outcomes for the delivery of good or improved animal welfare is increasingly recognised. Schemes will ultimately be required therefore, to audit against a fully integrated input – outcome system. The development of monitoring systems for welfare outcomes is however in its infancy. It was therefore considered inappropriate to include long lists of outcome based criteria at this stage in our comparison. Hence, only two outcome-based criteria are included in the analysis ("adequate monitoring of health and welfare by producers" and "monitoring of welfare outcomes by the assurance scheme") and credit is given for work towards developing and piloting the use of appropriate outcome measures. Future scheme analysis will inevitably include a much wider range of outcome-based criteria.

Each criterion is scored on a scale from zero to five, based on the written standards and accompanying documents published by the schemes; additional explanatory information provided to the author was also taken into account for criteria relating to auditing and monitoring. Score five indicates the scheme standards meet the welfare ideal for that criterion, score zero indicates the scheme standards do not satisfy the criterion at all, whilst scores one to four indicate the scheme standards partially satisfy the criterion to increasing degrees. The welfare ideal in this context is considered to be the highest standard that could realistically be achieved within the confines of viable commercial practice. Within

each set, some criteria are considered to be particularly critical to welfare; scores for these 'key criteria' are therefore doubled.

Since the number of criteria within each set may vary, the total score for each of the five sets is converted to a score out of 20 (via equivalent percentage calculation) with the overall score therefore presented out of 100. This allows each set equal weighting in the final score and the reader ease of comparison across schemes.

Where schemes offer significant welfare advantages compared with normal industry practice, this is recognised by rating the schemes:

Bronze

Score of 50% or higher. Offers an acceptable standard of welfare, with a number of welfare benefits compared with standard industry practice, but with many important issues still unresolved.

Silver

Score of 70% or higher. Offers a good standard of welfare, with many welfare benefits compared with standard industry practice, but leaves certain important issues unresolved.

Gold

Score of 90% or higher. Offers a high standard of welfare.

The ratings by species are presented in the summary table overleaf. The schemes are rated twice. Firstly, for the criteria relating to the animals' environment, as a measure of the welfare potential of the farming system (system rating). Secondly, for the scheme as a whole, as a measure of performance across all aspects of the standards (scheme rating). In order to achieve a particular rating for the scheme overall, an equivalent or higher rating must be awarded for the farming system.

These ratings are intended to give an indication of where the scheme standards provide a higher level of welfare than that provided by standard industry practice for individual species. However, since the level of welfare provided by, or commercially viable in, standard industry practice will not be the same across species, and there are differences in type, number and severity of welfare issues affecting each species, the scores and ratings are not directly comparable across species. This is particularly so where there are large differences in farming systems and practices.

Summary of the results

Scheme	Position	Total score /100	Farming System classification	Overall scheme classification
PIGS				
Soil Association	1st	81	Gold	Silver
Scottish Organic Producers Association	2nd	71	Gold	Silver
RSPCA Freedom Food	3rd	58	Bronze	Bronze
Assured British Pigs	4th	29	-	-
Quality Meat Scotland	5th	27	-	-
DAIRY CATTLE				
Soil Association	1st	76	Silver	Silver
RSPCA Freedom Food	2nd	63	Bronze	Bronze
Scottish Organic Producers Association	3rd	60	Gold	Bronze
Assured Dairy Farms	4th	22	-	-
BEEF CATTLE				
Soil Association	1st	70	Silver	Silver
Scottish Organic Producers Association	2nd	62	Silver	Bronze
RSPCA Freedom Food	3rd	60	Bronze	Bronze
Quality Meat Scotland	4th	23	-	-
Assured British Meat	5th	20	-	-
SHEEP				
Soil Association	1st	64	Silver	Bronze
Scottish Organic Producers Association	2nd	58	Gold	Bronze
RSPCA Freedom Food	3rd	56	Silver	Bronze
Quality Meat Scotland	4th	23	-	-
Assured British Meat	5th	19	-	-
BROILER CHICKENS				
Soil Association	1st	73	Silver	Silver
RSPCA free-range	2nd	69	Silver	Bronze
RSPCA minimum	3rd	64	Bronze	Bronze
Scottish Organic Producers Association	4th	53	Gold	Bronze
Assured Chicken Production free-range	5th	47	Bronze	-
Assured Chicken Production minimum	6th	40	-	-
TURKEYS				
Soil Association	1st	71	Silver	Silver
RSPCA free-range	2nd	59	Silver	Bronze
RSPCA minimum	3rd	54	Bronze	Bronze
Scottish Organic Producers Association	4th	52	Silver	Bronze
Quality British Turkey free-range	5th	39	Bronze	-
Quality British Turkey minimum	6th	32	-	-
LAYING HENS				
Soil Association	1st	70	Gold	Silver
RSPCA free-range	2nd	63	Silver	Bronze
Scottish Organic Producers Association	3rd	56	Gold	Bronze
RSPCA minimum	4th	55	Bronze	Bronze
British Lion Quality Code of Practice free-range	5th	33	Silver	-
British Lion Quality Code of Practice minimum	6th	21	-	-
SALMON				
Soil Association	1st	79	Silver	Silver
RSPCA Freedom Food	2nd	51	Bronze	Bronze
Code of Good Practice for Scottish Finfish Aquaculture	3rd	28	-	-

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The **Soil Association (SA)** achieved very good scores and first place of the schemes analysed across all species. The farming system was rated gold for pigs and laying hens and silver for all other species. Overall, the SA scheme was rated silver for all species, except sheep, for which it was rated bronze. The SA standards offer many welfare advantages relative to standard industry practice for all species.

The **Scottish Organic Producers Association (SOPA)** achieved very good scores for the environment criteria and out-performed the other schemes in terms of farming system classifications, rating gold for pigs, dairy cattle, sheep, broiler chickens and laying hens, and silver for beef cattle and turkeys. However, the overall scheme did not perform as well as the farming system classifications may suggest; the SOPA scheme rated silver for pigs and bronze for all other species. A number of issues in other areas of the standards need to be addressed in order to ensure the high welfare potential of the systems is fulfilled. Nonetheless, the SOPA standards offer many welfare advantages relative to standard industry practice for all species.

The **RSPCA Freedom Food Scheme** achieved good scores for all species, with a farming system rating of silver for sheep, free-range broiler chickens, free-range turkeys and free-range laying hens, and bronze for pigs, dairy cattle, beef cattle, indoor broiler chickens, indoor turkeys, indoor laying hens and salmon. Overall the scheme was rated bronze for all species. The RSPCA scheme consistently out-performed the other schemes in certain areas. These include the requirements for on-farm monitoring of animal health and welfare by producers, including targets for key parameters, the requirements for training of stockpeople, and specifications for, and monitoring of, the stunning and slaughter process. The RSPCA standards offer a number of welfare advantages relative to standard industry practice for all species.

The **Quality Meat Scotland (QMS)** scheme generally scored poorly and did not achieve a rating for the farming system or scheme for any species. The QMS standards offer few welfare benefits compared with standard industry practice and generally only ensure compliance with government welfare codes and minimum legislative requirements (the interpretation of which is considered inadequate in some cases).

The **Assured Food Standards (AFS)** schemes generally scored poorly. Free-range standards for broiler chickens and turkeys achieved a bronze farming system rating but neither these standards, nor any of the other AFS schemes, achieved an overall scheme rating for any species. The AFS standards offer few welfare benefits compared with standard industry practice and generally only ensure compliance with minimum legislative requirements (the interpretation of which is considered inadequate in some cases).

The **British Lion Quality Code of Practice** achieved a silver farming system rating (but no overall scheme rating) for its free-range laying hen standards but scored very poorly for its minimum standards. The Lion Code minimum standards generally only ensure compliance with minimum legislative requirements.

The **Code of Good Practice for Scottish Finfish Aquaculture (CoGP)** scored poorly and did not achieve a rating for farming system or overall scheme. The CoGP standards offer few welfare benefits compared with standard industry practice, although the requirement to use humane slaughter methods is a significant plus.

A summary of the main recommendations for scheme improvements is given in the table overleaf.

Acknowledgements

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Summary of the recommendations

General Criteria	SA	SOPA	RSPCA	QMS	AFS	LION CODE	CoGP
ENVIRONMENT							
No close confinement	●	●	● (pigs)	●	●	●	●
Adequate space allowance when housed	● (sheep)	●	●	●	●	●	●
Appropriate housing design	●	●	● (hens)	●	●	●	●
Provision of appropriate bedding/litter/enrichment material	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Provision of appropriate nesting facilities	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Appropriate lighting	●	●	● (salmon)	●	●	●	●
Free-range access	● (pigs; beef cattle)	● (pigs; beef cattle)	●	●	●	●	●
Adequate outdoor space	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Appropriate shelter/shade and protection from predators	●	●	●	●	● (poultry)	●	●
Appropriate social grouping	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HUSBANDRY							
No mutilations	● (cattle; sheep)	● (cattle; sheep)	●	●	●	●	●
No use of genetic engineering/cloning or invasive reproductive technologies associated with health or welfare problems	● (clone offspring)	● (clone offspring)	●	●	●	●	● (cloning)
Appropriate feeding	●	● (poultry)	●	●	●	●	●
Appropriate weaning age	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Adequate monitoring of health and welfare by producers	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
STOCKMANSHIP, HANDLING, TRANSPORT & SLAUGHTER							
Appropriate handling	● (turkeys)	● (turkeys)	●	●	●	●	●
Promotion of high quality stockmanship	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Frequent checks for signs of illness, injury or distress	● (cattle; sheep)	● (cattle; sheep)	●	●	● (pigs)	●	●
Short transport duration	●	●	● (salmon)	●	●	●	●
No live export	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Summary of the recommendations *continued*

General Criteria	SA	SOPA	RSPCA	QMS	AFS	LION CODE	CoGP
No use of livestock markets	● (cattle; sheep)	● (cattle; sheep)	● (calves)	●	●	●	●
Humane slaughter	● (pigs/ poultry)	● (pigs/ poultry)	●	●	●	●	●
Promotion of high welfare standards in the handling of animals during transport and slaughter	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

GENETICS & BREEDING

No use of breeds associated with increased incidence of health/welfare problems	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
High welfare standards for breeding animals	●	● (poultry)	● (poultry)	●	●	●	●
No killing of surplus male animals	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

AUDITING

Frequent inspections	●	●	●	●	● (cattle; sheep)	●	●
Spot-checks	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Monitoring of welfare outcomes by assurance scheme	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Measures to address non-compliance	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

- Standard generally good
- Some improvement recommended (as specified when applies specifically to one or two species)
- Major improvement recommended
- Criterion not relevant

Overall, the Soil Association achieved the highest scores for all of the species covered by the analysis. This scheme offers many welfare benefits compared with standard industry practice and the scheme standards would be expected to provide a significantly higher standard of welfare than that provided by adherence to minimum legislative requirements. The Scottish Organic Producers Association and RSPCA schemes also offer significant welfare benefits compared with standard industry practice and minimum legislative requirements. In general, the Assured Food Standards (Red Tractor) schemes and the British Lion Quality Code of Practice ensure little more than compliance with minimum legislative requirements (the interpretation of which is considered inadequate in some cases). The Quality Meat Scotland scheme requires compliance with government welfare codes but otherwise offers few benefits. With one or two significant exceptions, the Code of Good Practice for Scottish Finfish Aquaculture also offers limited benefits above compliance with relevant legislation. Consumers seeking an assurance of high welfare standards would be advised to purchase organic products, especially those certified by the Soil Association, or RSPCA Freedom Food-certified products, particularly those produced to free-range standards.

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