

The role of farmers in improving animal welfare

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Animal Welfare is an important issue in Dutch agriculture of today. Farmers play an important role in this discussion because they must be able and willing to improve animal welfare on their farms. Our research therefore focuses on the farmers and the role they can and want to play to improve animal welfare. In the project, emphasis is on main stream farmers who feel bad about animal welfare on their farm. They admit that this should be improved but they do not know how to achieve this in an economically sound way. A theoretical framework, based on Ajzen and Fishbeins's *Theory of Planned behaviour (TPB)* is used to analyze several cases in which adoption of animal welfare by mainstream farmers plays an important role. The first results show that freedom of choice – perceived behavioural control in terms of TPB – is an important argument of farmers to join an initiative that aims to improve animal welfare. Co-operation with stakeholders in the agro-food supply chain who have corresponding interests – subjective norms according to TPB – is important too. The lessons learned out of these cases are used to formulate a well-founded approach – at least – to change the perception of farmers with regard to animal welfare or – even better – to actually improve the animal welfare on farm level. This approach is tested in one or more participatory trajectories with farmers in the 2nd phase of the project.

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