



TARGETED HELP:

IMPROVING FARM ANIMAL WELFARE IN SCOTLAND
UNDER THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES



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This report was written based on research carried out by the Macaulay Institute, Aberdeen and the University of Edinburgh



Measures to improve animal welfare under the rural development payments were first agreed in 1999 but it was only with the 2003 Mid Term Review of the CAP that seven specific measures were permitted to improve animal welfare. The Agreement in 2005, laid out in Regulation 1698/2005, further defined these programmes.

Objectives were agreed to

- Improve agricultural competitiveness by supporting development, innovation and restructuring
- Improve the environment and countryside
- Improve the quality of rural life.

Seven specific animal welfare measures were agreed (Table 1).

An overview of the changes in the rural development programmes

The EU's farm subsidy system, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is over 50 years old. However payments to reward good environmental practices are only 20 years old and incentives to reward animal welfare were only introduced in 1999. In 2003 one of the many reviews and reforms of the CAP introduced a structured system of payments to reward and encourage good animal welfare practices such as payments to modernise farming systems and buildings and market products made under higher welfare systems. The Scottish programme was introduced under this phase.

The system was fine tuned in 2005 for the current 2007-13 programme and although it is not compulsory to make animal welfare payments (unlike payments on the environment) many governments have introduced them to their programmes.

This report is the first review of an animal welfare programme under the CAP. It shows the clear benefits of such a programme and it is hoped that the programmes coming on stream now will provide additional data and information in the future.





TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF MEASURES UNDER THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT REGULATION TO PROMOTE ANIMAL WELFARE

Measure	Amount €	Article of Regulation 1698/2005
Advisory service to improve the overall performance of the farm	1,500 80% of total costs	24 (2) Axis 1
Support to meet new standards of animal welfare by paying for costs incurred and income foregone due to enacting new obligations under the legislative standards	10,000 per holding for a maximum of 5 years	31(2) Axis 1
Support for participation in food quality schemes	3,000 on an annual basis	32(2) Axis 1
Information schemes to promote food quality schemes	70% of cost of programme	33 Axis 1
Payments to farmers that voluntarily make commitments to improve animal welfare standards beyond the legislative baseline; the payment is for additional costs, income foregone and transaction costs	500 per livestock unit, for a period of 5-7 years	40(3) Axis 2
Modernisation of farm buildings to improve performance or meet Community standards	40% of investment costs	26(2) Axis 1
Training costs including scientific knowledge which are not part of normal programmes	Up to 100% of the cost of the training activity	21 Axis 1

Implementation of these programmes is the responsibility of the Member States. In 2003 the RSPCA issued the report *Into the fold: creating incentives for animal welfare under the RDPs* which proposed how these initiatives could be set up under the rural development programmes.

This report examines the effect of one programme the *Animal health and welfare programme* introduced in 2005 in the Scottish Rural Development Programme and assesses its effectiveness to the farmer, the veterinarian and to the animals that it was designed to assist. As no formal review has been undertaken by the Commission, this is first review to be undertaken of an animal welfare measure under the rural development programmes in the EU and shows the potential of such measures as a tool to assist improve animal welfare and meet the objectives laid out in the Commission's action plan on the protection and welfare of animals, which has recognised the link between animal health and animal welfare.

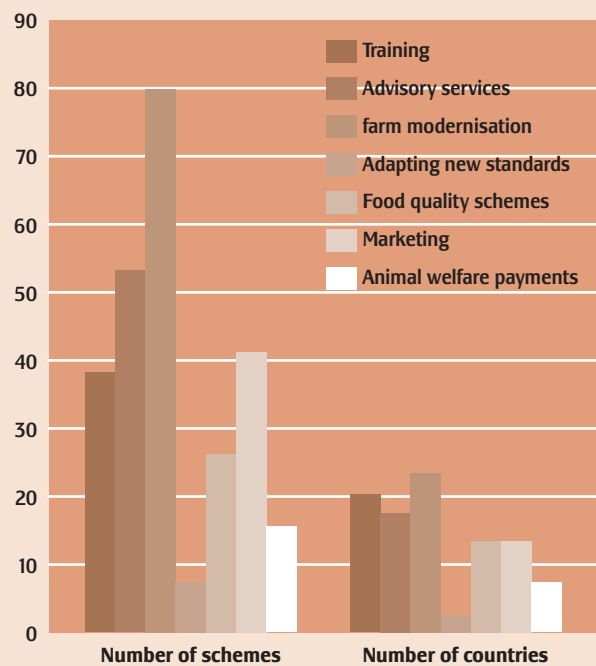


Status of rural development programmes benefiting animal welfare in EU countries

The rural development schemes are allocated to four Axes in Regulation 1698/2005. Schemes to promote animal welfare are under Axis 1 and Axis 2 (see Table 1).

In 2005 the Scottish scheme was one of the first in the EU that focused on animal welfare. Since then the new 2007-13 programmes have been agreed and include many more schemes from countries that will promote animal welfare. Eurogroup for Animals has undertaken an analysis of the currently agreed rural development schemes. There are 90 rural development programmes operating in the 27 EU countries. As the graph right highlights, the most popular scheme which includes animal welfare as an objective is farm modernisation which has been taken up by 81 different rural development programmes in 24 countries. However this scheme, as well as the advisory scheme, the assurance scheme and the promotional scheme are not exclusive to animal welfare but could focus on other issues such as the environment or organic farming. Of the two schemes that clearly make financial awards open to animal welfare benefits, the adaptation to demanding standards has been used by three countries with eight different programmes and the animal welfare payments has been included by eight countries in 16 programmes.

Uptake of the seven schemes in the rural development regulation that have the potential to benefit animal welfare



RICHARD MITTLEMAN/RSPCA PHOTOLIBRARY



Evaluation of the Scottish programme on animal health and welfare

What it does

In 2005 Scotland was the only UK country which had allocated funding streams to specific animal welfare measures. The axis 2 animal welfare measure was implemented in Scotland through the Animal Health and Welfare Management Programme which was

offered by the Scottish Executive as one of the options available in their Land Management Contract scheme. Table 2 summarises the framework used for the scheme.

TABLE 2 THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SCHEME

Issues	Parameters
Time scale	5 year commitment from 2005 though new entrants were excluded after 2006.
Animals	All except pigs and poultry
Farm	Any farm in Scotland that had over 4 livestock units
Standards	Above minimum and taking into account the Welfare of Farmed Animals (Scotland) Regulations 2000
Funding	To meet up to 75% of eligible costs incurred by the farmer
Goals of the plan	Undertake actions to implement the agreed plan
Compulsory parts required in the plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. implement a proactive scheme for the use of treatments, including guidance on the use of veterinary advice and treatment 2. To implement a proactive scheme for the use of vaccines and routine medications
Voluntary parts in the plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To undertake additional inspection and monitoring to collate performance indicators and analyse all significant animal health and welfare related observations arising from inspections and implement an action plan to measure performance 2. To produce a biosecurity plan to ensure the safe integration of new stock on farm and minimise the risk of spreading disease by maintaining fences around isolation areas to enhance biosecurity levels and to prevent diseases from entering the herd/flock 3. To analyse forage and obtain professional nutritional advice and implement advice from report 4. Biosecurity – Sampling – To undertake sampling to identify diseases / conditions such as twin lamb disease or copper deficiency, which may be present on farm having a negative impact on animal health and welfare and take informed control measures to address conditions



How it performed

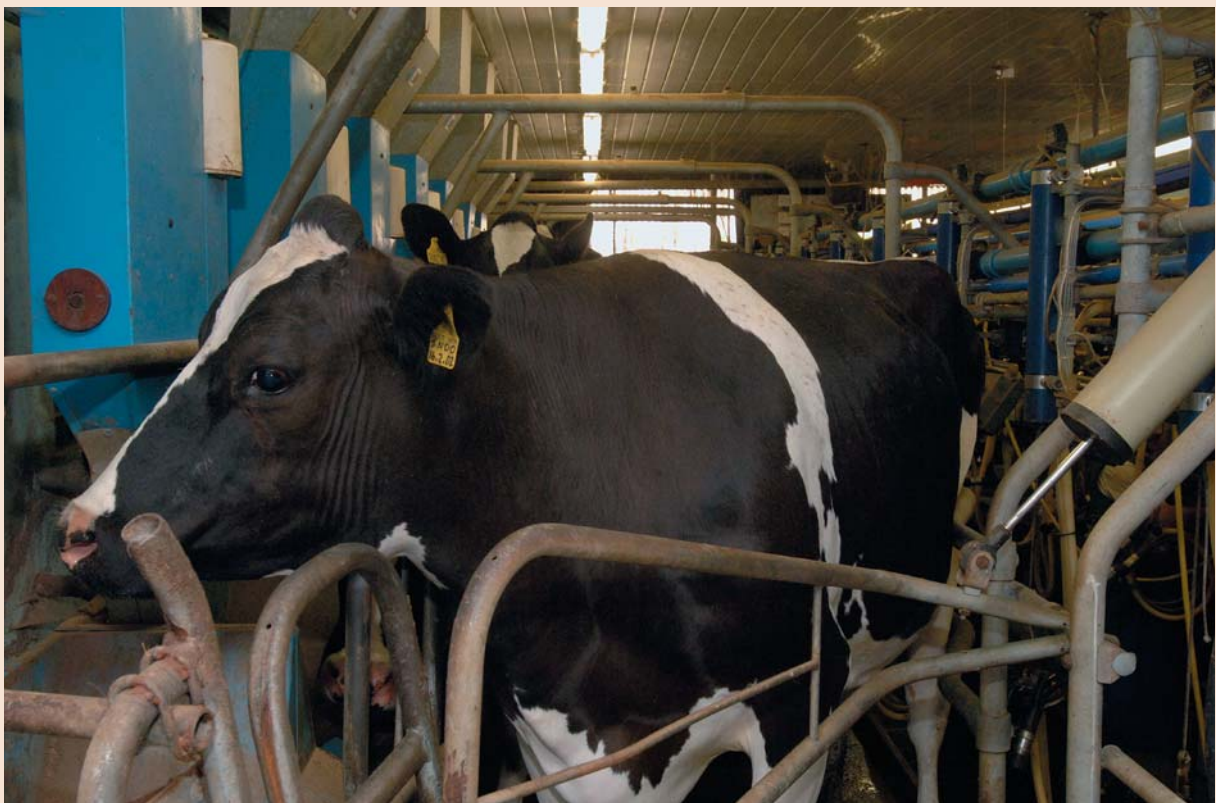
The programme was one of the most popular options in the entire rural development programme in 2005 with an uptake of nearly 3900 farms, most being cattle and sheep farms. Only the programme to encourage farmers to undertake quality assurance schemes had a higher uptake. After the "maintenance access option" the total amount claimed for the welfare programme was the second highest amongst all options with roughly 14% of the overall amount claimed under the menu scheme¹.

The Macaulay Institute, Aberdeen and Edinburgh University undertook a review of the programme to analyse how effective it was at improving animal welfare, and delivering benefits that couldn't be achieved through the market place. These were assessed through available statistical data such as the Scottish Executive's farm account survey and the benchmarking database and through targeted surveys of farmers and veterinarians evenly distributed in five different Scottish regions. As the scheme had only been in operation for three years and was closed to new applicants in 2007 the range of data was limited but some conclusions can be drawn.

The scheme was very popular, being joined by 3,699 participants in 2005 and a further 944 in 2006, which equates to 20% of all eligible registered farms and covers about 24% of the total agricultural land area.

The voluntary options were only started in 2006. Of the four options (Table 2) the most popular were performance monitoring followed by disease sampling and forage analysis (see graph on page 8).

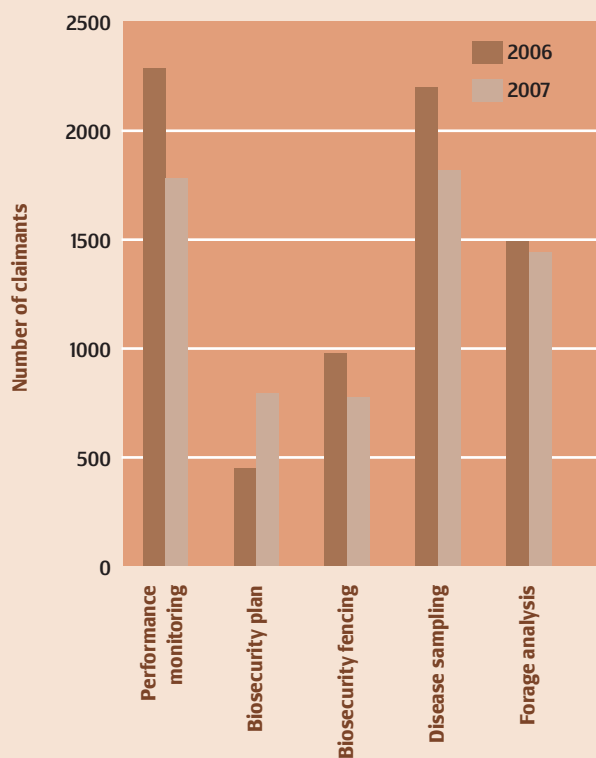
¹ Land Use Consultants and Small Town and Rural Development Group (2006): The LMC Menu Scheme Policy Analysis Research Project – Final Report. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/162097/0044041.pdf>



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Uptake of voluntary options



The uptake varied according to the different sectors. In 2007 dairy claimants under the scheme accounted for about 20% of dairy holdings and 28% of dairy cattle. Beef claimants accounted for 19% of holdings with suckler cows and 26.5% of animals and the number of sheep claimants represented 11% of farms and 15% of animals. So claimants tend to be those farms with above average herd or flock sizes.

The performance monitoring optional programme was designed to help farmers, in consultation with their veterinary advisors to identify animal health and welfare issues which are detrimental to their businesses and to formulate and implement action plans to rectify these problems.

Farmers on the scheme maintain records on issues such as disease which are submitted to their designated veterinary practice and entered into a national benchmarking database. This allows comparison between farms on performance and opportunities for monitoring local and national trends. As the scheme has only been in operation for three years, the numbers in the benchmarking exercise

for businesses recorded consecutively over the three year period are small (only 18 sheep farms and 39 cattle farms) so trend analysis on individual businesses did not produce any discernible trends. However descriptive analyses was possible on total numbers of farms to look at the incidence of disease on farms. This shows that respiratory infection was most commonly reported on cattle farms, affecting about half the farms in 2007 with an average infection rate of 13% of the herd on each farm. Lameness was evident on over half the farms but the incidence of 3-5% was small for the farms that reported it. However in sheep farms, lameness was the most important issue with 70-90% of flocks affected during the period although there has been a steady reduction in cases from 16% to 10% during the period. It is hoped that as more data is completed in the future further trend analysis will be possible.

The second part of the evaluation looked at farmer and veterinarian perceptions of the programme. A questionnaire was sent out to sample 12 participants and four non participants for each of the five livestock classes (lowland/upland sheep, dairy cattle, suckler cows, beef finishing and hill sheep) and a representative sample obtained based on region and size of farm. A questionnaire was also sent to ten veterinary practices who had participating as well as non-participating farmers, again split evenly on a regional basis.

More than 70% of the sample size agreed that the programme was a good way to reward farmers for additional animal health and welfare benefits. More than 50% of farmers surveyed also agreed that their perception of animal welfare had improved since being on the scheme, particularly amongst farmers in the highlands and northeast of Scotland. Farmers also suggested that their general outlook on livestock management had changed since being on the scheme particularly with placing more emphasis on disease management and prevention.

Not surprisingly the reason why farmers chose the animal welfare part of the programme was to tackle existing animal health and welfare problem. Very few decided to take the programme as it was easy to do or because they would get a reward for animal welfare programmes that were already being undertaken.

However about a third of farmers on the scheme thought the challenges of animal health and welfare on their farms were below average compared to 12 of the 14 non participating farmers who felt that the extent of their on farm welfare and health problems were unknown or average. This raises the question of if the farms with the most challenging welfare and health problems are motivated to join the scheme.



When questioned on the animal health and welfare challenges that they faced, farmers stated that bovine viral diarrhoea was the most important one for dairy and beef finishing systems, biosecurity and pneumonia in calves for suckler cow systems and lameness for sheep. Farmers participating in the scheme were then asked to assess any changes in the incidence of mastitis, lameness, abortion and calf/lamb mortality that had occurred during their participation on the scheme. As the scheme has only been operational for three years it is perhaps not surprising that 23% stated that the programme had not improved animal welfare on their farm compared to 60% that provided positive feedback. Of those that did report an impact, reduced calf and lamb mortality and reduced lameness and mastitis were identified as positive impacts due to better targeted treatments.

One of the key achievements of the programme from the farmers' perspective was the improved collaboration between them and veterinary practices. The survey looked at the economic impacts of participation by focusing on any changes in veterinary costs and any impacts on the operating revenues and profits of the farms. Prior to joining the programme the average costs on veterinary advice and treatments was between 8% (in the Highlands and Dumfries regions) to 17% (in the northeast and Scottish borders). The majority of farmers indicated that veterinary costs remained unchanged in the period that they had been on the scheme but that a shift had occurred from spending money on disease treatment to spending on vaccines and other routine medications. The control group of farmers not on the scheme reported that the amount spent by them on disease treatment had increased over the past three years. This seems to confirm that the programme has brought about a closer collaboration between farmer and veterinary practice which had focused the farm on disease prevention rather than disease treatment.

It is very difficult to draw any conclusions regarding disease prevalence rates as the database which now holds the animal health and welfare data has only recently been established. The new Scottish Animal Health Planning System (SAHPS) established in June 2008 should give better data for sheep flocks initially and allow comparison of flock's production and disease status and comparison with those adopting the benchmarking option.

Positive changes in farm profit were reported by half the respondents but there was a difference between dairy farmers who reported no impact on revenue and profit and sheep farmers, particularly in the highland and Western Isles regions who reported positive impacts on profit due to better lambing.



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The veterinarians' assessment of the scheme confirmed the positive feedback from the farmers. Seven of the eight practices reported a positive impact on farmers' perceptions of animal health and welfare. They stated that the undertaking to write and deliver a health plan focused farmers on timing vaccinations better, recording and analysing data and having a more open relationship with the veterinarian. The findings also show the first indication of reductions in animal health and welfare incidences as a consequence of joining the programme. Half of the veterinarian practices surveyed indicated a 20% reduction in incidences of welfare and health problems in four areas (mastitis, lameness, abortion and calf/lamb mortality), with a decrease in incidences of lameness being reported by six of the eight practices.

The information from the farmers and veterinarian surveys suggest that improvements in welfare and disease are starting to occur. It is more difficult to transmit certain welfare attributes through the marketing chain such as for sheep and dairy cattle where there may be a reduced perception by the public on the level of animal welfare problems. Whilst most farmers agreed that higher animal welfare benefits should be rewarded through the market, the difficulties of adopting such an approach for certain species was also acknowledged.



Although the scheme has yet to be accepted as an option for the forthcoming 2007-13 programme, data will continue to be gathered from the participants in the present scheme for the next few years. A number of technological developments should make evaluation of this scheme easier and more objective in the future. The Scottish Animal Health Planning System (SAHPS) established in June 2008 should give better data for sheep flocks initially and allow comparison of flocks' production and disease status and comparison with those adopting the benchmarking option. Further data under the benchmarking database will allow better analysis of trends. Although benchmarking welfare is more difficult than recording production or disease metrics, the next year should see the development and wide application of protocols to assess measures.

The RSPCA has recognised that measuring outcomes as well as inputs would provide more information about the welfare issues on farms. It was the first to develop welfare protocols for dairy cattle, pigs and poultry following research at Bristol University. These outcome assessments measure the health and welfare of the animals kept

under the scheme and help producers focus on any areas of health and welfare that might need attention. They are currently being trialled on Freedom Food farms², the UK's only farm assurance scheme solely aimed at improving animal welfare and analysis of results is expected in 2009. In addition, the EU-sponsored "Welfare Quality" project is developing a suite of validated measures for the European Commission³.

² www.freedomfood.co.uk

³ <http://www.welfarequality.net/everyone>



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Conclusions

- The animal health and welfare management programme was the second most popular options in the Scottish rural development scheme indicating a relative wide acceptance of the programme amongst the farming community. About 20% of registered and eligible farmed joined the programme amounting to about 24% of the total Scottish agricultural land area.
- The total amount claimed for the welfare programme was the second highest amongst all options in Scotland's rural development programme, accounting for 14% of amounts claimed
- Of the four voluntary options performance monitoring was the most popular option in 2006 while disease sampling was most popular in 2007. Most farmers elected for 2 options in 2006 and 3 in 2007.
- Data from the benchmarking database provided little insight into the health status due to the small sample size and fact that the limited time of the scheme
- Farmers surveyed said that animal health and welfare concerns played an important role in the motivation of farmers to join the programme. While farmers seem to have joined the programme for the "right" reasons, the analysis raises the question if the "right" farms take part in the programme as the survey results indicate that farms with lower than average animal welfare problems have joined.
- The programme had a positive impact on farmers' perceptions of animal welfare.
- There was an apparent shift in farmer spending from disease treatment to spending on preventive medicine (with a reported decline in the number of cases of disease)
- It is very difficult to draw any conclusions regarding disease prevalence rates as the database which now holds the animal health and welfare data has only recently been established.
- Both farmers and veterinarians report the first signs of economic and animal health and welfare benefits, although differences between livestock systems exist. Economic benefits seem to be more evident for beef cattle and sheep livestock systems than for dairy farmers.
- It is an encouraging sign that both farmers and veterinarians indicate reductions in animal health and welfare problems in areas such as abortions and lameness in sheep.
- The improved connection between farmer and veterinarian is key but there may be challenges to have sufficiently trained veterinarians with the specialized knowledge and willingness to foster a partnership approach in Scotland which is experiencing a decline in rural veterinary services
- Improvements have occurred that would not have been seen if left to market forces particularly as transmission of animal welfare attributes through the marketing chain are not easily available for species such as sheep and dairy cattle.



TARGETED HELP:



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