



The Animal Welfare and Behaviour Group, part of the University of Bristol's School of Veterinary Science, is a centre of excellence in animal welfare science. It has a strong focus on innovation, implementing research findings and seeking real world solutions. It has played a major role in developing and promoting the welfare outcomes concept.



The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) was established in 1824 and is the leading animal welfare charity. The Society is concerned with all animals, including farm animals, and has a team of farm animal scientists who, in addition to promoting improvement in farm animal welfare through advice provision and advocacy, develop detailed animal welfare standards for the main farm animal species. The standards are used by the Society's farm assurance and food labelling scheme, Freedom Food, which is solely dedicated to improving farm animal welfare.



Founded in 1946 the Soil Association is the UK's leading organic organisation. As an educational charity it acts to increase awareness of organic food and farming and campaigns to improve animal welfare and our environment. Its organic standards are enforced by its certification subsidiary, Soil Association Certification Ltd. Animal welfare is a central organic principle and the organisation drives improvement through education, advice, project involvement and its pioneering organic standards.

**Collaboration opportunities**

AssureWel would like to collaborate with other assurance schemes, retailers, producer groups, government bodies and researchers so that we can learn from and support each other in the application of welfare outcome methodologies. Financial support from The Tubney Charitable Trust means that some funding may be available to assist other organisations that wish to work with us to deliver the project goals.



**CONTACTS**

**Dr David Main**  
University of Bristol  
d.c.j.main@bristol.ac.uk

**Anna Fraser**  
RSPCA  
farm\_animals@rspca.org.uk

**Alison Bond**  
Soil Association  
abond@soilassociation.org

Cover image credits: James Silverthorne, Angela Hampton, Andrew Forsyth/RSPCA Photolibrary



**Improving farm animal welfare through welfare outcome assessment**



This project is supported by The Tubney Charitable Trust

**A collaborative project led by:**





# AssureWel

Advancing Animal Welfare Assurance

**The AssureWel project will develop a field-tested framework that fully embeds welfare outcome assessment into inspections and standards development within UK and European farm assurance schemes. The multi-species five-year (2010–2015) project is led by the University of Bristol, RSPCA and Soil Association, and has collaborative links with several industry bodies including the Red Tractor Farm Assurance scheme, Quality Meat Scotland, and UK Organic Certifying Bodies.**

## The background

Farm assurance schemes play a major role in ensuring the welfare of farm animals. Currently, to be approved by a farm assurance scheme a producer must implement and achieve the standards required by the scheme. Such standards generally focus on what must be provided to the animals, primarily in terms of resources and management requirements, and are termed 'input' standards.

Although there may be good scientific and practical evidence to suggest that these input standards are important for animal welfare, there is a widely recognised need within the food and farming industries for assurance schemes also to include welfare outcome assessment.

**Welfare outcome assessment** is a scientifically informed process that involves assessing a number of animals for a variety of different measures relating to their health, physical condition and behaviour. The results gathered provide a more direct measure of the welfare of the individuals assessed and the overall level of welfare being achieved on that farm. However, as yet, research on the welfare outcomes approach, such as the European-wide Welfare Quality® project, has not been translated into a viable methodology for use in inspection and certification systems.

**PROJECT VISION: FOR ALL FARM ASSURANCE SCHEMES TO USE WELFARE OUTCOME ASSESSMENT TO ITS FULL POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE FARM ANIMAL WELFARE.**

**The AssureWel project** will develop a practical and achievable mechanism for implementing welfare outcome assessment into farm assurance schemes, to further improve farm animal welfare. Once developed, the RSPCA and Soil Association will incorporate this approach into their respective farm assurance schemes. The project also aims to support the uptake of this field-tested framework by other certification schemes.

## Summary of AssureWel objectives

- Field-test and translate research on welfare outcomes, including Welfare Quality®, into a practical, commercially viable assessment methodology for the major farmed animal species.
- Fully integrate welfare outcome assessment for the main species covered within RSPCA Freedom Food and Soil Association farm assurance schemes. This includes mechanisms to provide producer advice and support with regards to detecting, monitoring and improving welfare issues, including feedback, benchmarking and encouraging positive husbandry change via 'farmer learning networks'.
- Encourage the use of welfare outcomes in other UK and European farm assurance schemes through:
  - demonstrating how welfare outcome assessment can be delivered in farm assurance schemes
  - sharing our field-tested assessment methodology
  - publishing learnings from the project annually
  - engaging and encouraging collaboration between industry stakeholders through forums and seminars
  - providing training for vets, inspectors and external advisers.
- Research and develop the methodology for a broiler chicken welfare label, based on method of production with outcome safeguards.

## How welfare outcome assessment can be used to improve animal welfare

- To help determine the level of welfare being achieved for an individual animal, farm or farm assurance scheme.
- To help identify and monitor welfare risks, problems and solutions.
- To help evaluate and compare the effect of different farming systems on animal welfare.
- To help evaluate and improve the farm assurance process and scheme standards.
- To help inform on-farm management practices through self-assessment, feedback and benchmarking.
- To provide more reliable and direct assurance of animal welfare to stakeholders throughout the food chain, including consumers.

**Planned timescale for introducing welfare outcome assessment into the RSPCA and Soil Association farm assurance schemes:**



Photo credits: Helena Lovincic, Bronswerk, Elizabeth Dover/istock