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Improving animal welfare: qualitative and quantitative methodology in the study of farmers' attitudes

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Abstract

The welfare of production animals provokes wide social discussion among the public, yet, despite this, farmers' voices and their representations of animal welfare are rarely heard, even though farmers are the ones actually able to improve animal welfare. Farmers' perceptions of what constitutes animal welfare and how it may be improved can differ from those of consumers and other stakeholders, and therefore it is crucial to understand what farmers mean when they talk about improving animal welfare. To chart farmers' perceptions, we conducted qualitative interviews and a questionnaire study using the theory of planned behaviour as a conceptual framework. We found that the farmers perceived the improvement of animal welfare as four specific, practical attitude objects (providing animals with a favourable environment; taking care of animal health; treating the animals humanely; and taking care of the farmer's own well-being) and two different but often overlapping general attitudinal dimensions (the instrumental and intrinsic evaluations of animal welfare). The farmers' intentions to improve animal welfare were best explained by their attitudes towards the specific welfare-improving actions. The concept of the improvement of animal welfare examined in this study outlines measures to improve animal welfare from the farmers' point of view and discusses their influence. Our study demonstrates that by adapting a valid conceptual framework and applying relevant qualitative and quantitative methods that support each other, we are able to elucidate the underlying meanings and values in farmers' views on improving animal welfare.

Keywords: *animal welfare, attitude, farmer, production animal, qualitative attitude approach, theory of planned behaviour*