

Farm Animal Welfare: Audits and Certification Programs

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Introduction

Livestock and poultry welfare assessments and audits have been developed as a result of increased public and consumer concerns for raising animals humanely and improving welfare standards. Animal welfare is defined as “an animal’s state in regards to its attempts to cope with its environment” (Broom, 1986). Commercial livestock production operations can participate in voluntary animal welfare certification programs to assure that they are maintaining compliance with standards for raising animals. Animal welfare audits are a comprehensive benchmarking system to assure and assess minimum husbandry standards at the time the audit is conducted. In the U.S., animal welfare auditing systems have been developed as a result of retailers working with animal agriculture industries to develop scientifically based guidelines (Mench, 2003). Animal welfare measurements are used to improve animal welfare and productivity (Grandin, 2010), as well as to reassure the public that U.S. farms are providing adequate levels of animal welfare for food animals and to gain consumer trust through independent audits (Webster, 2001).

This Extension bulletin is the first in a series on animal welfare assurance and audit programs. We will discuss the foundation of animal welfare, ways to assure livestock and poultry welfare, national producer organization animal welfare programs, and independent animal welfare certification programs. Other bulletins in this series will compare and contrast species-specific audit program guidelines.

Background

Livestock and poultry animal welfare program guidelines were first built upon The Five Freedoms in the European Union. Written in 1965, the Brambell Committee in the United Kingdom (Brambell, 1965) laid the foundation for animal welfare standards when the Brambell Committee conducted an investigation of farming practices that led to the development of the Five Freedoms, which were then formalized by the Farm Animal Welfare Council in 1979 (FAWC, 1979). The Five Freedoms state that animals should have:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from discomfort
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease
4. Freedom to express normal behavior
5. Freedom from fear and distress

Some freedoms are easier to assure than others. For example, to ensure that an animal is not subjected to hunger or thirst, an auditor must verify that the animal has access to food and water. However, it is more difficult to ensure that an animal is free from fear and distress. This is why program guidelines are written under the guidance of scientific advisory committees to update and revise programs with findings from the most up-to-date scientific literature on good animal husbandry.



Table 1. Website links to national producer organization animal welfare guidelines.

Organization	Website
American Sheep Industry Association (ASI)	https://www.sheepusa.org/ResearchEducation/AnimalCareWelfare
National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA)	http://www.bqa.org/resources/manuals
National Chicken Council (NCC)	http://www.nationalchickencouncil.org/industry-issues/animal-welfare-for-broiler-chickens/
National Pork Board (NPB)	http://www.pork.org/production-topics/swine-well-humane-treatment-animals/
National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF)	http://www.nationaldairyfarm.com/animal-care#standardsapp
United Egg Producers (UEP)	http://uepcertified.com/
National Turkey Federation (NTF)	http://www.eatturkey.com/standards

Ways to Assure Animal Welfare

Livestock and poultry animal welfare standards take the form of laws, guidelines and certification programs (Table 4). There are two federal livestock animal welfare laws in the U.S: the Twenty-Eight Hour Law (9 CFR 313; passed in 1873; amended in 2005) and the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (49 U.S.C. 80502; passed in 1958). However, these laws are limited to animal transportation and slaughter. While there are no federal laws that regulate the raising of livestock and poultry, various animal industry commodity groups have established voluntary guidelines containing best management practices.

Animal welfare certification programs are voluntary, but food retailers may drive which audit program the producer follows. Auditors use audit tools that are species-specific to the certification program. Different types of auditors can perform an on-farm animal welfare audit. Internal auditors are employed by livestock or poultry companies wishing to obtain certification, and they perform audits ensuring the company is meeting specific external audit criterion. A second-party auditor is employed by a stakeholder group, such as a retailer. Third-party auditors are independently contracted to conduct audits and have no association with the producer or stakeholder (Table 4).

Animal welfare auditors are often trained through independent certification programs, such as the Professional Animal Auditor Certification Organization (PAACO) and Farm Animal Care Training and Auditing (FACTA), or through programs offered by other auditing organizations. PAACO and FACTA are organizations of animal experts that provide a “seal of approval” for animal welfare auditors and animal welfare audit instruments. In addition to education and training, PAACO and FACTA also review and/or certify animal audit instruments, assessments and programs upon request. Other professional organizations that offer third-party animal welfare auditing services include the United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA-AMS), Silliker, and Validus.

Depending on the program, audits may be conducted every 1 to 3 years on-farm or in other areas where animals are kept. Certification programs vary but generally include standards for breeding and genetics, environmental and health management, euthanasia, space allowance, pest and rodent control, transportation, records and plans for emergencies, and slaughter. To become certified, a third-party audit is required and performed by an audit organization independent of the consumer-supplier relationship, free of any conflict of interest. For example, before a product can be labeled as Certified Humane, an animal welfare auditor needs to conduct an audit to determine if the farm seeking certification is in compliance with the animal welfare standards of Humane Farm Animal Care. To verify that programs are following their audit procedures, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA-AMS) audits the certification organization’s audit process. Audit assessment guidelines are currently available for numerous species, including sheep, goats, broiler chickens, laying hens, geese, turkeys, dairy cows, beef cattle, pigs and bison.

Industry Standards: National Producer Organizations

Some U.S. retailers require their suppliers to adhere to minimum animal welfare standards maintained by national producer organizations (Mench, 2003). National producer organizations are trade associations who represent, protect and promote their industry’s members. Members are stakeholders in the livestock and poultry industries, such as producers, processors and veterinarians to whom the organization’s standards are tailored. National producer organization certification programs are voluntary; however, most retailers require

their suppliers to be certified under these programs. Certification requires application to the program, a farm site inspection and written inspection report by an auditor, and maintaining certification standards once certification is granted.

National livestock and poultry organizations that provide animal welfare guidelines for assessment and audit are the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI), National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA), National Chicken Council (NCC), National Pork Board (NPB), National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), United Egg Producers (UEP), and National Turkey Federation (NTF).

Product Differentiation and Labeling Certification Programs

Farm animal welfare certification programs are offered by nonprofit organizations, as well as organizations specific to animal welfare auditing. The certification process is similar to national producer organizations. Certification programs typically have scientific advisory committees comprised of academic professionals to keep programs up to date on current research, technological advances, and best management and animal handling practices on-farm. Although certification through these programs is voluntary, premiums or consumer perception benefits may encourage participation.

The following animal welfare certification programs in the table below were created by non-profit organizations. Each certification program has its own logo/label that is placed on products certified through their program. The information provided in this bulletin for each program was accessed on the program website.

Table 2. Website links to non-profit organization animal welfare certification programs

Organization	Website
American Humane Certified	http://humaneheartland.org/
Animal Welfare Approved	https://animalwelfareapproved.us/
Certified Humane Raised and Handled	http://certifiedhumane.org/
Food Alliance	http://foodalliance.org/
Global Animal Partnership	https://globalanimalpartnership.org/
American Grassfed	http://www.americangrassfed.org/
Farm Animal Care Training and Auditing	http://factallc.com/



American Humane Certified

American Humane Certified, created by the American Humane Association (AHA) in 2000, was the first non-profit animal welfare certification program in the U.S. Founded in 1877, AHA was the country’s first national humane organization. AHA is also the largest U.S. animal welfare certification organization. The American Humane Certified animal welfare standards are species specific and based on input from their scientific advisory board. Farms are audited annually to assure compliance and maintain certification.

Animal Welfare Approved

Animal Welfare Approved (AWA), created by A Greener World (AGW) in 2006, is a non-profit organization funded by donations from individuals supporting transparency in the food system. AWA animal welfare standards require that livestock and poultry be raised on range- and pasture-based systems. AWA is one of two U.S. animal welfare labels that audits slaughter practices. Farms are audited annually to assure and maintain AWA certification compliance.

Certified Humane Raised and Handled

Certified Humane Raised and Handled was developed in 1998. The Certified Humane program is offered by the Humane Farm Animal Care (HFAC) non-profit organization. Certified Humane products are in the U.S., Canada, Brazil, Chile and Peru. Certified farms do not keep any animals in cages, crates, or tie stalls. HFAC’s scientific committee is comprised of 39 animal scientists and veterinarians from the U.S., Canada, Europe and South America. Compliance is audited annually to maintain certification.

Table 3. Standard criteria for each GAP step label rating.

Step	Criteria
1	No cages, no crates, no crowding
2	Step 1 + Enriched environment
3	Step 2 + Enhanced outdoor access
4	Step 3 + Pasture centered
5	Step 4+ Animal centered; no physical alterations
5+	Step 4 + Animal centered; entire life on same farm

Table adapted from <https://globalanimalpartnership.org/5-step-animal-welfare-rating-program/>

Food Alliance Certified

Founded in 1995, Food Alliance is a non-profit organization supported by organic and conventional agriculture. Food alliance started as a project of Oregon State University, Washington State University and the Washington State Department of Agriculture. Food Alliance’s certification program is based on standards that define sustainable agriculture. Therefore, in addition to the animal welfare audit, a whole farm audit must also be performed. The certification term is 3 years.

Global Animal Partnership

The Global Animal Partnership (GAP) certification program was established by Whole Foods Market for their producers in 2008. The program is a 5-step third-party animal welfare rating certification program (GAP Step rating). GAP’s three components to define animal welfare are health and productivity, natural living and emotional well-being. Once a third-party audit has been conducted and a GAP Step rating has been assigned, the rating is displayed on GAP certified animal product labels.

American Grassfed

The American Grassfed Association (AGA) standards apply to ruminant animals, including beef cattle, bison, goats and sheep. Prior to introducing their standards in 2009, AGA worked with the USDA to establish a legal definition of grassfed. AGA concentrates on four areas of production: diet, confinement, antibiotics and hormones, and animal origin. Farms certified by AGA adhere to requirements in each area, and animals must be raised on pastures. AGA animals are fed a diet of grass and forage from weaning to harvest. Animals are raised on pastures, never given growth hormone and treated with antibiotics only when sick. Additionally, animals must be born and raised on the same farm to be AGA certified.

Farm Animal Care Training and Auditing

Farm Animal Care Training and Auditing (FACTA) provides animal welfare assurance, auditing, and training programs. FACTA audits animal welfare using national producer organization standards, non-profit organization standards, as well as FACTA’s internal standards. FACTA offers a 4-tier animal welfare audit system: Tier 1 reviews and establishes a farm’s existing animal welfare program; Tier 2 audits animal welfare based on industry standards; Tier 3 audits the farm using FACTA’s animal welfare standards, an audit report is reviewed by the auditor and FACTA’s Scientific Advisory Committee, and recommendations for improvement are provided; and a Tier 4 audit determines the animal welfare risk to the corporation and brand. FACTA also offers sustainability and biosecurity audits.

Summary

Livestock and poultry welfare auditing programs in the U.S. are intended to assure consumers that the animals their food comes from are raised humanely. The standards that livestock and poultry producers who participate in such voluntary programs are held to are written and/or reviewed by scientific committees affiliated with national producer organizations, retail companies and non-profit organizations. Producers today have several options to certify their operations through appropriate animal welfare certification programs; animal products certified through these programs can then be marketed using a distinguishing label. All U.S. livestock and poultry operations selling product to the public are subject to state and federal laws and regulations, but those operations that choose to participate in certification programs are additionally audited to maintain minimum animal welfare standards.

Table 4. Definitions pertaining to animal welfare audits.

Term	Definition
Animal welfare	The state of an animal in regards to its attempts to cope with its environment (Broom, 1986).
Assessment/certification program	An assessment conducted by a second or third party of how animals are managed in terms of the welfare guidelines and standards set using an organization's audit tool
Assurance	A positive declaration intended to give confidence
Audit	An official inspection of an animal production-related facility, typically by an independent body
Auditor	A person who conducts an audit
Audit tool	The document of written standards that the inspector uses to perform the audit
Certification	The action or process of providing someone or something with an official document attesting to a status or level of achievement
External audit	An audit performed by second and third parties
Guideline	A document that contains information on how to perform different procedures such as handling that will be useful for training personnel
Humane	Having or showing compassion or kindness
Internal audit	An audit conducted by employees of the company being audited; the assessor may use audit tools created internally or those used by external auditors
Quality assurance	A method of maintaining a certain level of quality or preventing defects to provide accurate confidence that an entity will fulfill requirements for quality
Second party	A person or group affiliated with a company that is affected by the outcomes of company actions
Stakeholder	A person or organization with an investment or interest, or concern in something, especially in business
Third party	A person or organization that is independent of the consumer-supplier relationship and is free of any conflict of interest
Welfare standard	The minimum measurable species-specific management criteria to which the animals are raised

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