

# The Welfare Quality Project

The European Union (EU) launched a Welfare Quality (WQ) Project in May 2004.

The five-year project is to provide practical science based tools and strategies to improve the welfare of farm animals.

Thirty-nine institutes and universities from 13 countries are involved, with a total budget of 17 million Euros (about \$23.5 million CAD).

The objectives of the project are to:

- 1) develop practical strategies to improve animal welfare;
- 2) develop a European on-farm welfare assessment standard;
- 3) integrate the most appropriate expertise in the multidisciplinary field of animal welfare in Europe.

A number of research projects are underway including:

- Extensive consumer and producer surveys;
- Market assessments;
- Initial development of animal welfare monitoring systems.

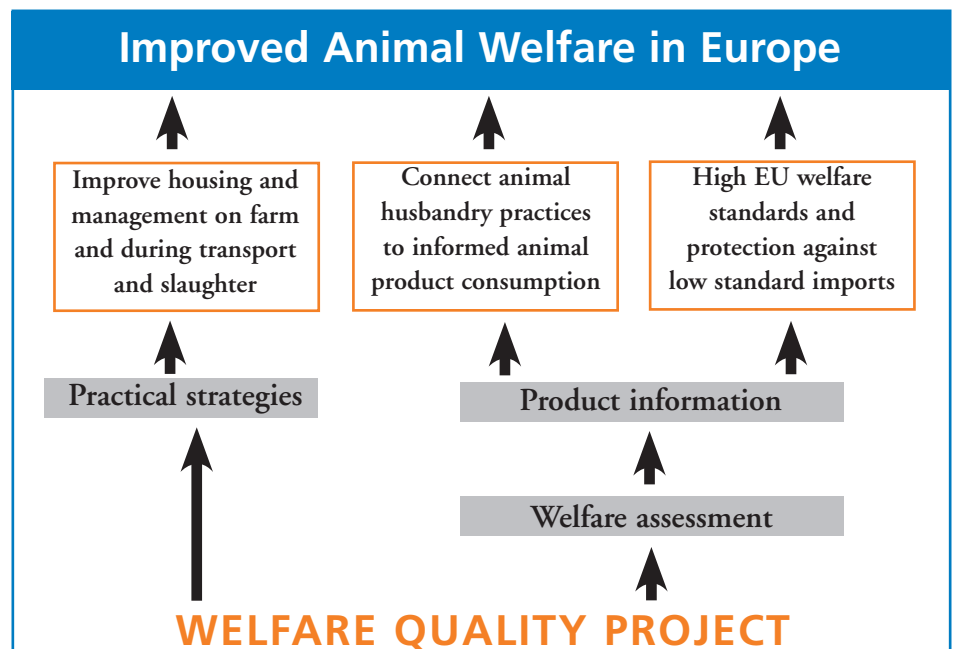
Initial research results were reported during a November 2005 conference in Brussels. Conference proceedings and more information on the WQ project are available at [www.welfarequality.net](http://www.welfarequality.net). Points of interest are:

- Consumer surveys/focus groups indicate that while consumers believe that farm animal welfare is an important issue:
  - They admit to a lack of knowledge on the subject;
  - “A significant portion of consumers deliberately avoid expanding their knowledge on farming practices and animal welfare in a desire to distance themselves from ethically challenging issues”.
- WQ will focus on animal-based measures (e.g., health and behaviour) for welfare assessments. Resource (e.g., access to food) or management (e.g., cage size, flooring) based measures will be used in a secondary fashion to identify the causes of, and solutions to, a welfare problem. For example, lameness (animal-based measure) may indicate a need for improved hoof care or flooring (management measures).



- Despite compliance with rigorous resource-based standards, welfare problems like lameness are still high on RSPCA Freedom Food assured dairy farms.
- WQ project is looking at genetic solutions to welfare problems.
- There are multiple mentions of links between animal welfare and food quality/food safety.
- **One of the end goals of the WQ project is to develop a ‘welfare friendly label.’**
- The President of the European Dairy Farmers says, “the problem is that the consumers demand for cheap food has created a pressure to develop more efficient and competitive production systems. This pressure, exerted by consumers, retailers and politicians, has, at times, become so intense that it has led to production systems that have gone beyond a sense of animal welfare.” He points to retailers and buyers as the key persons to take “economic responsibility to fulfill the demands of good animal welfare in the products they buy and present to the consumer.” ■

Welfare Quality Project - [www.welfarequality.net](http://www.welfarequality.net)



The Welfare Quality project supports three routes to improve animal welfare