



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

28 December 2023

Dear ,

## **ATISN 19350 – Farm Animal Welfare**

### **Information requested**

Thank you for your request which we received on 29 November 2023.

You asked for:

Since January 2019, what specific actions has the Welsh Government taken in relation to each of the following:

1. Reducing the incidence of lameness in broiler chicken flocks.
2. Improving litter management in broiler chicken units to reduce respiratory distress associated with ammonia and other emissions.
3. Ensuring that improved enrichment activities are provided for chickens in broiler chicken units.
4. Reducing the incidence of fractures and other injuries in chickens associated with the depopulation of laying hen units.
5. Improving oversight of depopulation activities for broiler chicken and laying hen units to prevent distress and injury of chickens by inappropriate actions of catching gangs and others.
6. Reducing the number of unwanted male dairy calves killed shortly after birth.
7. Reducing the number of male dairy calves that are killed in slaughterhouses within a few weeks of birth.
8. Reducing the incidence of mastitis and laminitis in dairy cattle
9. Improving the longevity of dairy cattle before killing.
10. Reducing the incidence of tail-docking of sheep.
11. Improving welfare standards at slaughter for any farm animal species.
12. With regards to our Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26, you state there are almost no apparent specific planned actions to improve farm animal welfare, except for mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses, and you ask why this is?
13. With regards to our Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26, you ask which of our scheduled actions have been implemented according to the stated

timescale and which have not. You ask for reasons to be provided where activities have not been implemented according to the stated timescale.

## **Our response**

The information you requested is enclosed.

### **1. Reducing the incidence of lameness in broiler chicken flocks.**

Our Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens was published in March 2020: [Meat chicken welfare: code of practice | GOV.WALES](#)

The code is intended to encourage all those who are responsible for these animals to adopt the highest standards of husbandry. It explains what a person needs to do to meet the standards of care the law requires.

The Code provides guidance on lameness.

All meat chickens undergo ante- and post-mortem assessment at the slaughterhouse. For conventionally reared meat chickens the results of these assessments are fed into the “trigger system”. The system generates a report if Foot Pad Dermatitis score is high or if post-mortem condition of birds suggests welfare issues. The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) uses this information to identify farms at highest risk of non-compliance with animal welfare legislation, and targets inspections to those farms identified as being at highest risk.

### **2. Improving litter management in broiler chicken units to reduce respiratory distress associated with ammonia and other emissions.**

Our Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens provides guidance on litter management.

The “trigger system” generates a report if the respiratory conditions score is high or if post-mortem condition of birds suggests welfare issues. APHA use this information to identify farms at highest risk of non-compliance with animal welfare legislation, and targets inspections to those farms identified as being at highest risk.

### **3. Ensuring that improved enrichment activities are provided for chickens in broiler chicken units.**

Our Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens provides guidance on environmental enrichment.

### **4. Reducing the incidence of fractures and other injuries in chickens associated with the depopulation of laying hen units.**

Our Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets was published in March 2020: [Laying hen welfare: code of practice | GOV.WALES](#)

The Code provides guidance on skeletal health and catching and handling.

APHA, exercising Welsh Minister functions, and Local Authorities undertake on-farm welfare inspections and assess compliance against legislation and the Code of Practice.

**5. Improving oversight of depopulation activities for broiler chicken and laying hen units to prevent distress and injury of chickens by inappropriate actions of catching gangs and others.**

See our response to Question 4.

**6. Reducing the number of unwanted male dairy calves killed shortly after birth.**

We support the GB Dairy Calf Strategy. The Strategy brings together a range of industry stakeholders, Governments and academia, and aims to ensure that all dairy-bred calves are reared with care and for a purpose, as part of either the dairy or beef supply chains: [GB Dairy Calf Strategy: FAQs | AHDB](#)

**7. Reducing the number of male dairy calves that are killed in slaughterhouses within a few weeks of birth.**

See our response to Question 6.

**8. Reducing the incidence of mastitis and laminitis in dairy cattle**

The Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group's Implementation Plan (2022-2024) was published in January 2022: [Wales Animal Health Welfare Implementation Plan \(gov.wales\)](#)

Working with stakeholders and delivery partners to address lameness in cattle is a key objective of the Framework Group.

A consultation on delivering the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) was launched on 14 December: [Sustainable Farming Scheme | GOV.WALES](#)

The consultation includes proposals on achieving and promoting high standards of animal health and welfare, including:

- The Animal Health Improvement Cycle (AHIC) where farmers will work with their vet to deliver ongoing improvements to animal health.
- A requirement for farmers to complete competency training and carry out lameness and body condition scoring to improve livestock welfare standards.
- A requirement for farmers to establish biosecurity protocols to reduce the risks of disease entering or leaving their farm.

We support Ruminant Health & Welfare's UK Dairy Cattle Welfare Strategy 2023-2028: [RHW-Dairy-Cattle-Welfare-Strategy-2023-2028-APP.pdf \(ruminanthw.org.uk\)](#)

The six key strategic goals of the strategy are: thriving cows; healthy feet; comfortable cows; appropriately nourished cows; healthy udders; and positive welfare.

We support a range of training initiatives promoting evidence-based best practice cattle foot trimming techniques. The necessary qualification a trimmer must have to deliver these courses has just been updated to mandate a requirement for the accredited Level 4 Qualification on Bovine Lameness and Professional Cattle Foot Trimming.

We funded the 'Herd Advance' programme. An initiative set out to help Welsh dairy farmers lift herd profitability and performance by improving disease prevention and control. During Year 3 of the project there was a significant drop in the rate of lameness between 2-3 cows/100 cows/year through use of the 'Healthy Feet Programme'.

### **9. Improving the longevity of dairy cattle before killing.**

See our response to Question 8.

### **10.Reducing the incidence of tail-docking of sheep.**

Our Code of Practice for the Welfare of Livestock: Sheep provides guidance on tail-docking: [Sheep welfare: code of practice | GOV.WALES](#)

Sheep farmers should consider carefully if tail-docking is necessary, in discussion with their veterinary surgeon.

The Animal Welfare Committee was asked to consider the welfare implications of castration and tail-docking of lambs, including new devices being developed with the aim of reducing the welfare harms. The Committee's Opinion on the Implications of Castration and Tail Docking for the Welfare of Lambs was published in September: [Animal Welfare Committee: opinion on the implications of castration and tail docking for the welfare of lambs | GOV.WALES](#)

Reports of Government-funded research by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) into new devices for castration and tail-docking were published in October: [Science Search \(defra.gov.uk\)](#)

We are carefully considering the results of the SRUC research and the Animal Welfare Committee's latest recommendations to ensure the best welfare outcomes for lambs.

### **11.Improving welfare standards at slaughter for any farm animal species.**

We have consulted on proposals to require CCTV in all approved slaughterhouses in areas where live animals are present: [Closed-circuit television \(CCTV\) in slaughterhouses | GOV.WALES](#)

Regulations to require CCTV in all slaughterhouses will be introduced in spring 2024.

In conjunction with Defra and the Scottish Government, we commissioned and received advice from the Animal Welfare Committee:

- Opinion on the welfare of goats at the time of killing (published July 2020): [AWC opinion on the welfare of goats at the time of killing - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/454222/awc-goats-2020.pdf)
- Methods for killing piglets on farm (published December 2021): [AWC advice on methods for killing piglets on farm - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/454222/awc-piglets-2021.pdf)
- Update to the 2014 FAWC Opinion on the welfare of farmed fish at the time of killing (published September 2023): [Animal Welfare Committee: update to the 2014 Farm Animal Welfare Committee opinion on the welfare of farmed fish at the time of killing | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/government/commitments/animal-welfare/2023-09-20-awc-farmed-fish)

**12. With regards to our Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26, you state there are almost no apparent specific planned actions to improve farm animal welfare, except for mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses, and you ask why this is?**

Our priorities for animal welfare are set out in our Animal Welfare Plan for Wales: [Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021 to 2026 | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/government/commitments/animal-welfare/2021-26-awp)

The plan includes a timetable for the delivery of key actions against four animal welfare Programme for Government commitments, and our other animal welfare priorities including:

- A commitment to require CCTV in all slaughterhouses during this Government's term.
- A commitment to restrict the use of cages for farmed animals.
- Working with the UK and Scottish Governments to consider how the protection of animal welfare during transport can be strengthened. We consulted jointly with the UK Government on proposals to ban live export for slaughter and proposals to improve the conditions of animal transport more generally: [Improvements to animal welfare in transport | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/government/commitments/animal-welfare/2021-26-awp)
- Working with the UK Government on introducing additional safeguards for animals through the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill. This included a ban on the export of livestock for slaughter. That Bill has now fallen. Ending live animal exports for slaughter and fattening is a priority for the Welsh Government. We are working closely with the UK Government on the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill which was introduced to Parliament on 4 December: [Animal Welfare \(Livestock Exports\) Bill publications - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](https://www.parliament.uk/bills/2021-22/animal-welfare-livestock-exports)

**13. With regards to our Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26, you ask which of our scheduled actions have been implemented according to the stated timescale and which have not. You ask for reasons to be provided where activities have not been implemented according to the stated timescale.**

The actions for each Programme for Government commitment have been delivered according to the timelines set out in the annex to the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26.

## Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,  
Welsh Government,  
Cathays Park,  
Cardiff,  
CF10 3NQ

or Email: [Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales](mailto:Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales)

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely