



## ***NORDIC ISAE 2006***

***Proceedings of the 18<sup>th</sup> Nordic Symposium of the  
International Society for Applied Ethology***

***18-19 January 2006  
Espoo, Finland***

***SSES  
FINNISH SOCIETY FOR  
APPLIED ETHOLOGY***

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*Finnish Society for Applied Ethology*

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Published by: Finnish Society for Applied Ethology*

## Production animal welfare – farmers’ attitudes and practices

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Are farmers’ attitudes and production animals’ welfare related? What kinds of attitudes do farmers have regarding the improvement of production animal welfare? How do farmers define production animal welfare? How do farmers view their own possibilities to improve animal welfare?

Production animal welfare is an important issue in society today. Although welfare is influenced by several actors, farmers are in key position determining animal welfare as their attitudes define their willingness to improve animal welfare. Increased size of production units and decreased economic viability may affect working ability and motivation of farmers which furthermore can affect their behaviour towards animals and thus animal welfare. Attitude has in many studies been shown to have a significant effect on the stockperson’s behaviour and furthermore on animal welfare and productivity.

In our preliminary study we explored farmer’s attitudes towards production animal welfare at 9 Finnish pig production farms and 9 dairy farms in 2005. One researcher interviewed the farmers while another observed animals’ living environment, technological solutions on farm, methods used to taking care of animals, and animals’ behaviour and expressions of fear and aggression. By interviewing we wanted to explore farmers’ attitudes towards improving the welfare of their animals. We used the method of qualitative attitudes interview (developed by Rantanen & Vesala 1999). We asked farmers to comment several statements regarding production animal welfare. By this procedure we were able to study how an informant defines the target of attitude and how he/she justifies his/her evaluations.

As a tool for analysis we used a theory of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). According to them, person’s intention determines if he/she will act upon his/her attitude. Intention is determined by norms (EU, neighbours, consumers, other farmers) and person’s evaluation of his/her possibilities to act according to his/her attitude. We searched relations between evaluations and justifications and tried to find larger attitudinal dimensions embracing different statements and respondents.

We found several dimensions of attitudes, some of them being contradictory but not always exclusive. In general, animal welfare seemed to be in harmony with or in contrast to farmer’s interests. The most apparent dimensions were:

**Moralistic view:** Improving animal welfare is important because of animals themselves.

**Utilitarian view:** Improving animal welfare is important because it is economically productive. **Farmer CAN improve farm animal welfare:** associated with farmer’s own attitudes and motivation, networks and collaborators, and farmer’s responsibility to take care of his/her health. **Farmer CANNOT improve farm animal welfare:** associated with farmers’ limited resources (time, skills, money, health) and increasingly competitive markets.

By interviewing we found out how farmers see the importance of improving production animal welfare, how they consider their possibilities to act to improve animal welfare and do they believe they can affect the welfare of their animals. Our following step is to compare these attitudinal dimensions with the animal observation data and find links between attitudes and practices of different farms and farmers. By studying the connection between attitudes, animal welfare, productivity and profitability we can find methods to motivate farmers to improve animal welfare.