

Challenges and Solutions To Supporting Farm Animal Welfare in Ireland

Responding to the Human Element



**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	2
<i>Introduction</i>	2
<i>Report Outline</i>	3
CHAPTER 2	4
<i>Farm animal welfare as an area of concern</i>	4
<i>Farming in Ireland</i>	5
<i>Farm animal welfare in Ireland</i>	5
Legislation	6
Prevalence of farm animal welfare incidents in Ireland	8
<i>Recommendation</i>	8
Further reading	8
CHAPTER 3	9
<i>Understanding Human-Animal Relations</i>	9
Overview	9
Farmers under pressure	10
Some farmers are more at risk than others	11
Implications for human-animal relations	12
<i>Recommendations</i>	13
Further reading	13
CHAPTER 4	15
<i>Farmers and farm animal welfare in Ireland</i>	15
Overview	15
Research project 1: <i>Identification of key performance indicators for on-farm animal welfare incidents</i>	15
Research project 2: <i>Exploring the human element of farm animal welfare incidents in Ireland</i>	17
<i>Recommendations</i>	18
Further Reading	19
CHAPTER 5	20
<i>The Professional Response to Farm Animal Neglect</i>	20
Overview	20
<i>Recommendations</i>	23
Further Reading	23
CHAPTER 6	25
<i>Lines of approach and recommendations for policy makers and practitioners</i>	25
Overview	25
1. Building on-farm capacity: Helping farmers help themselves	25
2. Minimising the risk: On-farm early intervention and the early warning-system	26
3. Managing an on-farm crisis: When agencies intervene	28
4. Post-crisis management	30
Appendix 1: Chapter 6 Supporting Tables	32
Acknowledgements	34
Bibliography	34

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Over recent decades, changes in agriculture have pushed animal welfare as a topic of concern into mainstream public, policy and political conversations (Buller and Morris, 2003; Fraser, 2014; Broom, 2016). Despite the relationship between farmers and farm animals being important for farm animal welfare standards, there is limited understanding of how the nature of this relationship influences welfare outcomes. Understanding the complexities of this relationship and the wider context in which these complexities are situated is central to forming and implementing interventions that can be effective in improving farm animal welfare on individual farms.

Looking through the lens of the human-animal relationship, this report outlines the challenges and solutions to supporting farm animal welfare in Ireland from a social science perspective. It sets out to:

- Provide an overall context for farm animal welfare in Ireland by summarising the legislative context while also outlining current initiatives that address farm animal welfare in Ireland.
- Provide a context for the human dimension of farm animal welfare by integrating findings from existing research on farm animal welfare in Ireland, and drawing on theoretical literature to help position and support existing research.
- Provide recommendations of lines of approach to policy makers and practitioners.

The report is based on the work of two research projects conducted in Ireland in 2009 and 2012. These projects sought to:

- Identify key performance indicators that can be monitored to enhance farm animal welfare strategies in Ireland (Research project 1).
- Investigate the human factors that contribute to farm animal neglect in Ireland, and explore the experiences of veterinary professionals (private veterinary practitioners and government veterinarians) who have responsibility to ensure the welfare of animals (Research project 2).

Overall, this report aims to:

- Increase national and international awareness of the centrality of the relationship between human welfare and farm animal welfare, and of the challenges experienced by veterinary professionals who encounter complex farm animal welfare situations. This report will be of significant interest to a transdisciplinary audience comprising policy makers and animal welfare legislators; practitioners involved in farm veterinary care and inspection, and in human health; farm, rural and animal welfare advocacy groups; and academics involved in the social, health and veterinary sciences. The report will also be of benefit to those advocating for the *One Welfare* concept.
- Introduce the *One Welfare* concept with the aim of providing practical guidance to assist stakeholders, policy makers and legislators in the formation and delivery of farm animal

welfare support interventions that are farmer and animal-centred – including approaches aimed at building on-farm capacity and compliance with animal welfare legislation. It is hoped that this report will contribute to further conversations on the practical application of the *One Welfare* concept.

- Ultimately, this report hopes to assist legislators, policy makers, and practitioners in reducing the number of farm animal incidents and improving farm animal welfare standards.

The projects referred to above were led by a transdisciplinary steering committee comprising:

- Catherine Devitt, Social Scientist
- Professor Simon More, Professor of Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis, and Director of the UCD Centre for Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis
- Associate Professor Alison Hanlon, School of Veterinary Medicine, University College Dublin
- Patricia Kelly, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Martin Blake, Chief Veterinary Officer, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Report Outline

The following report provides a background to these two research projects, identifying key challenges and recommended lines of approach for practitioners and decision-makers. The report comprises six chapters. Chapter 2 provides a context for farm animal welfare by presenting an overview of farming and animal welfare legislation in Ireland. Chapter 3 outlines the significance of human-animal relations for animal welfare outcomes, and identifies the stressors and risk factors that may undermine this bond. This Chapter also introduces the concept of *One Welfare*. Chapter 4 presents an overview of the two research projects seeking to explain farm animal welfare incidents in Ireland, and identify solutions to improving welfare interventions. Chapter 5 outlines the experiences of government and private veterinarians when responding to farm animal welfare incidents. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes with recommended lines of approach for practitioners and policy makers.

CHAPTER 2

Farm animal welfare as an area of concern

In recent decades farming in Europe has shifted towards intensification, industrialisation, and specialisation. These changes have been driven by technological innovation, increasing demand for affordably priced food, and the availability of farm subsidies. Small family farms remain, although the trend is for larger, more intensive systems, particularly in poultry and pig production, and more recently, in dairy farming. These changes in food production and other variables (for example, increased urbanisation, changing rural/urban dynamics, developments in animal science and awareness of the linkages between human and animal health) have transformed how we view farming and our relationship with farm animals. As a result, animal welfare is now a topic of public, policy, and political concern.

Societal concern about how animals are treated has focused on the important social contract that exists between humans and animals on the farm. This contract is based on the principle of good stewardship and care for the animal, requiring ‘good husbandry skills’ (Rollin, 1995).

The Five Freedoms and Provisions framework (FAWC, 1993) was established to provide guidance on defining the welfare status of an animal, signifying their nutritional, health, behavioural, environmental, cognitive, and physical needs, and the required provisions to meet these needs (Table 1). More recently, conversations on animal welfare have shifted to incorporate ‘a life worth living’. This concept recognises that in some instances, negative experiences (such as those encountered by animals used in food production) cannot be eliminated. Instead, animal owners should not only comply with minimal welfare standards, but also include significant welfare enrichments (Mellor, 2016).

Table 1: The Five Freedoms framework for animal welfare provision

Five Freedoms	Five Provisions
Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition	Ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
Freedom from discomfort	Providing a suitable environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
Freedom from pain, injury and disease	Prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
Freedom from fear and distress	Ensuring conditions avoid mental suffering.
Freedom to express normal behaviour	Providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals own kind.

Farming in Ireland

Agriculture plays an important social, cultural and economic role in Ireland.

- Beef and dairy production are the main farming sectors in Ireland (Teagasc, 2018)¹. With over 6.6 million cattle in Ireland, of which nearly 1.3 million are dairy cows, these sectors are currently undergoing expansion under the *Food Harvest 2020* and *Food Wise 2025* – road maps for the expansion of the Irish agri-food sector. Ireland has over 3.4 million sheep.

* Data taken from the Central Statistics Office website. “*Agriculture – Selected Livestock numbers in December: Farm animals in December (Thousand) by Type of Animal and Year*”

As in other European countries, farming and rural life more generally are undergoing processes of change. A decline in farm numbers has stabilised in recent years, however, in comparison to the early 1990s, there are approximately 30,000 fewer farms currently in Ireland.

Results from the National Farm Survey (Teagasc, 2018) show that:

- The average farmer age is 56 years, and 31% of farmers have an off-farm income;
- The average family farm income is €31,374. Income distribution is a concern, with major differences in income recorded across farming systems: 35% of Irish farms produce an income of less than €10,000, and 30% were classified as economically vulnerable.
- Over half (53%) of all *cattle rearing* farms and 36% of *sheep* farms earned less than €10,000. Highest farm income is on dairy farms, with 40% earning an income of between €50,000 - €100,000.

Rural economic decline can expose some farmers to financial vulnerability, limit their access to financial capital and increase the risk of isolation because of diminishing rural based social support and health services (Morrissey et al., 2009; Ní Laoire, 2011; Cleary et al., 2012). An increasingly ageing farming population, limited farm help and limited retirement opportunities will also create a number of on-farm difficulties. These and other components, such as the push towards intensification, may have implications for farm animal welfare standards, and the underlying factors that contribute to animal welfare incidents.

Farm animal welfare in Ireland

In Ireland, responsibility for the duty of care for farm animals lies with the animal owner/keeper. Government advisory bodies such as the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC) publish animal welfare guidelines/codes of practice on good welfare practice. Animal welfare

¹The Census of Agriculture (2016) recorded approximately 137,500 farms in Ireland, with just over half (52.7%) located in the border, midlands and western region of the country, and the remainder in the east and southeast.

charities, a number of which also receive some financial support from government, also engage in building awareness of welfare issues, and in confined situations, are involved in welfare inspections. Alongside Sweden and Cyprus, Ireland has the highest proportion of respondents (80%) across EU member states that rate the protection of farm animal welfare as “very important” (Eurobarometer, 2015).

Legislation

The regulatory approach to farm animal welfare in Ireland in the 20th century has witnessed significant changes. Until 1980, animal welfare legislation focused on animal protection and acts of commission. These provided the necessary grounds for prosecution for animal cruelty, meaning that animal suffering had to have taken place before legal action could follow. Although a conceptual change towards safeguarding animal welfare followed in the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes Act (1984), it was not until the EC Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes Regulations (2000) that the necessary legal provisions were provided to instruct animal owners to improve animal welfare standards.

The Animal Health and Welfare Act (2013) provides a modern and comprehensive legislative framework focused on ensuring and protecting the welfare of animals in Ireland. Prior to its establishment, in the absence of signs of physical animal injury, it was difficult to bring about a prosecution for animal neglect.

The **Animal Health and Welfare Act (2013)** places a legal responsibility on the owner/keeper to provide for the needs of and to ensure animal wellbeing.

- The Act builds on the concept of a ‘duty of care’ for owners/keepers of animals (used in food production, as companions, and in sport) to ensure animals are kept and treated in a manner that preserves their health and welfare, and does not threaten theirs or another animal’s health and welfare.
- The Act enables the designation of suitably trained inspectors of certain NGO animal welfare organisations as authorised officers, although these inspectors deal mainly with equine and companion animals.
- An individual can be classified as being incapable of taking care of an animal(s), due to mental or physical debilitation, addiction, or a personality disorder. Animals can be sold or disposed of, their numbers reduced, and persons deemed incapable can be prevented from further ownership.
- In cases of non-compliance with the animal welfare regulations, an authorised officer (e.g., government veterinarian) may serve a ‘welfare notice’ on the animal owner/keeper with instructions to remediate the farm welfare situation on the farm (Table 2).

Table 2: Roles involved in farm animal welfare governance

Role	Role in farm animal welfare governance
Government veterinarians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for ensuring compliance with food safety standards and with animal health and welfare regulations in farmed animals. • Government veterinarians can issue welfare notices to the animal owner, and/or animal keeper in instances where the necessary animal welfare regulations are not complied with. • These notices are used to provide the animal owner with a prescriptive outline of the actions that must be followed in order to bring about an animal welfare resolution on the farm, and to satisfy the necessary regulatory requirements.
Private veterinarians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Code of Professional Conduct (2012) for private and public veterinarians in Ireland establishes that the primary concern of private veterinarians is the protection of animal health and the relieving of animal suffering. They are required to prioritise animal welfare over other interests, in line with legislative requirements. • Private veterinarians also have a professional obligation to report incidents of animal neglect or animal abuse to the relevant authorities, and professional discretion cannot take precedence over legal obligations.

In 2004, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) established an **Early Warning System (EWS)** based on recommendations from the FAWAC:

- A nationwide collaborative approach between the Irish Farmers Association, DAFM, the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and in some regions, the Health Service Executive.
- The EWS provides for relevant agencies and bodies, or individuals known to the farmer, to carry out timely interventions before animal welfare problems become critical. Its overall aim is to alleviate the potential for farm animal neglect.
- Efforts are being made to extend involvement to other agencies, such as An Garda Síochána (the Irish Police), the Local Authority Veterinary Service and Private Veterinary Practitioners.

Introduced in 2008, the DAFM **Animal Field Inspection Testing (AFIT) database** collects information and data on regulatory specific (on calves, pigs, laying hen, and broilers) and general (all species on-farm) inspections carried out by government veterinary inspectors, and technical agricultural officers. Gathered information includes data on farm animal welfare, types of animals kept, their regulatory health status, housing and access to feed and water, the on-farm stocking density, record keeping, and in the case of cattle, mortality and movement to knackery (an animal by-product processing facility).

Prevalence of farm animal welfare incidents in Ireland

Incidents of farm animal neglect remain relatively low, yet farm animal neglect remains an on-going concern in Ireland. One unpublished study conducted by DAFM reported a total of 494 animal welfare incidents investigated over an eleven-month period (September 2006 - July 2007). During on-farm investigations, some 1,500 animals were reported dead, 619 were disposed of through the knackery service, and 78 animals required euthanasia (Flanagan, 2007; Kelly et al., 2011).

Recommendation

- The **AFIT database** could yield potentially useful information regarding the nature of farm animal welfare cases across time, the types of interactions, and the possible relationships between welfare cases, farm and farmer characteristics. This would require a **standardised system** that would assist implementing a surveillance system to identify at-risk situations and in **early intervention planning**.

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CHAPTER 3

Understanding Human-Animal Relations

Overview

Traditionally, analyses of human interactions with non-human animals have concentrated chiefly on the human-animal bond and companion animal ownership. There is now increasing focus, particularly in pig, sheep, cattle and poultry production, on understanding ‘human-animal interactions’ and ‘human-animal relations’ associated with handling and stockmanship, and the implications for animal welfare and productivity.

Human-animal interaction has been defined as the sequence of observable behaviour shown towards an animal, e.g. petting, grooming, hitting, slapping, shouting, rough and unpredictable handling.

The number and nature of interactions influence **human-animal relations**. These relationships can be positive (the animal has a high level of confidence in people and low level of fear), negative (high fear and stress levels) or neutral (the animal exhibits a low fear towards humans, but avoids human contact) (Hosey, 2008).

Although good regulation is important for animal welfare, understanding and working with ‘the complexities, paradoxes and messiness of human-animal interactions’ (Jones, 2006: 197) is an equally important component for strategies aimed at improving animal welfare standards.

Farmer wellbeing and animal welfare rely, among other aspects, on positive human-animal relations:

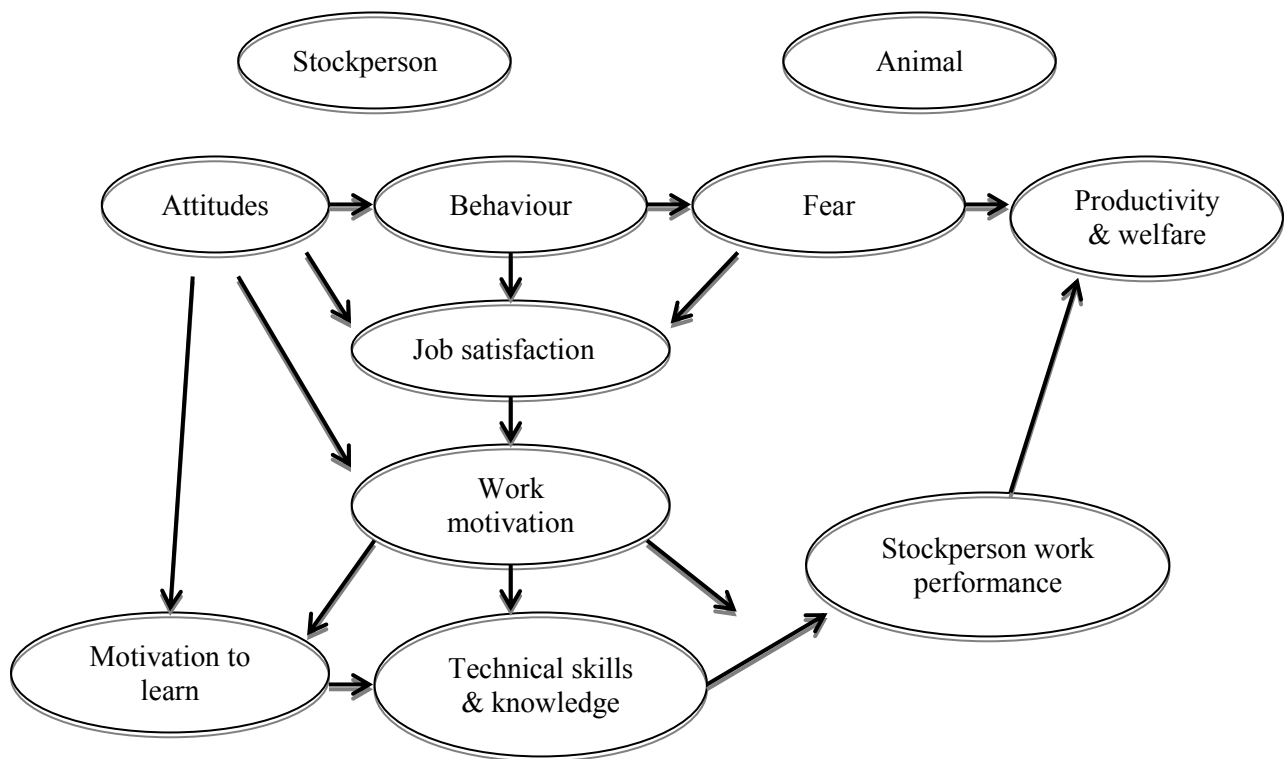
- Farmer attitudes and behaviour are important, and these are influenced by farmer personality, empathy towards farm animals, motivation, and feelings of job satisfaction. A positive relationship between the farmer and farm animals can alleviate farming-related stress, enhance job satisfaction and improve productivity (Hemsworth and Coleman, 1998; Hemsworth et al., 2002; Kielland et al., 2010).

Coleman and Hemsworth (2014) identify three farmer-related variables that influence animal welfare (Table 3 and Fig. 1). While individual farmer-based variables shape human-animal relations, the wider rural, cultural and policy context also matters in influencing farmer experiences and shaping what takes place on the farm.

Table 3: Variables that influence farmer-animal relations (Source: Coleman and Hemsworth, 2014)

Capacity	Farmers’ skills, health, knowledge and ability to implement and maintain good farm animal welfare standards on their farm.
Willingness	Farmer motivation, job satisfaction, work attitude, and attitude towards the animals.
Opportunity	Working conditions on the farm, the actions of co-workers, and the wider policy and regulatory context.

Figure 1: Work related characteristics in the sequential relationship between farmer attitude and farm animal welfare (Source: Coleman and Hemsworth, 2014)



Farmers under pressure

The pressures that farmers are exposed to can undermine positive human-animal relations. As a profession, farmers are vulnerable to high stress levels, depression and mental health problems, and, relative to other professions, they experience high suicide rates (Lobely, 2005; Lunner et al., 2013; Kunde et al., 2017) (Table 4).

Table 4: Occupational, environmental, and locational stressors associated with farming

Stressors	Nature of stress and stress contributors
Occupational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to economic risk, financial uncertainty and volatility, debt and economic difficulty. • Stress arising from increased regulation concerning production processes, welfare and environmental standards, and the need to adjust to changing regulator contexts. Stress arising from additional paperwork and the need for regulatory compliance, adding to farmer workload and pressure. • Labour shortages and unskilled labour can also add to occupational stress, as can long work hours, time constraints, and potentially harmful exposure to farm hazards. Blurring between work and home life, with farmers' lifestyle becomes inseparable from their occupation.
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to the physical environment, the dependency of farming livelihood on favourable weather conditions, the potential for crop and animal diseases, and the impact of weather-related crises, such as periods of drought or flooding on farm management and production. These pressures may become more prevalent under changing climatic conditions.
Locational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rural nature of farming and long working hours increases the potential for social isolation, as does limited access to social support services, particularly in very rurally isolated areas. • Failure to seek support can increase the risk of farmer isolation.

Some farmers are more at risk than others

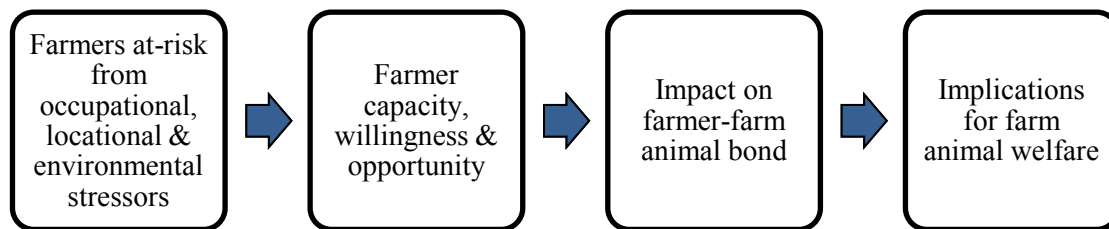
- Isolated farmers and smallholders are more susceptible to stressors. Non-farm specific issues, such as marital status (single male farmers are more at risk), age (older farmers), and experiences of illness, relationship breakdown, or the death of a family member can each amplify stressors.
- The demands of the profession, in addition to low levels of control over variables important to farming (such as weather, production prices, and regulatory requirements) and limited social support, can create the conditions for a poor social and psychological environment.
- A farm crisis (e.g., an animal disease outbreak) can increase stress and anxiety.
- A stressed environment increases the risk of psychiatric problems, on-farm injuries, marital breakdown, and suicide. Farmers may choose not to seek help because of denial, self-reliance, or a fear of stigma. Poor access to appropriate supports in rural areas may

increase this isolation.

Implications for human-animal relations

The differential factor between animal neglect and animal cruelty and abuse may be the farmer's affective mental state and intention. Stress, anxiety and depression, production-related pressures and pressures in family life can cause impaired functioning on the farm, compromising on-farm safety, and disrupting everyday farming patterns and activities. These experiences may increase the risk to animal welfare standards, and the risk of being convicted for animal cruelty or neglect (Fig. 2). Forcibly removing animals can cause animal keepers to relapse and for their health/wellbeing to deteriorate. This creates challenges for professionals charged with the responsibility of ensuring farm animal welfare standards.

Figure 2: At-risk farmers and implications for farm animal welfare



INTRODUCING *ONE WELFARE*

One Welfare builds on the *One Health* Initiative by advancing the relationship between human and animal health to include human wellbeing and animal welfare, providing a platform for multidisciplinary collaboration.

‘Considering health and welfare together — because of the interconnections between human, animal and environmental factors — helps to describe context, deepens our understanding of the factors involved, and creates a holistic and solutions-oriented approach to health and welfare issues.’ (Garcia Pinillos et al., 2016)

One Welfare involves bringing together various disciplines and professions, including social scientists, community and rural development, human health professions, veterinary professionals, and agricultural scientists to work collaboratively on animal welfare, and human wellbeing.

This approach can help to improve animal welfare and address social problems, poverty and community support, and food safety, human wellbeing, farming productivity, food security, and sustainable development.

Recommendations

- Research into the **availability of labour, skill gaps and on-farm labour** related challenges could prove important to understanding working conditions for farmers and the impact on farm animal welfare.
- Relevant roles and agencies – veterinary professionals, government inspectors, rural and community support services, health services – need to be aware of the **human-animal relationship** and the nuanced relationship between human health and wellbeing, farmers under pressure, farm animal welfare and the risk of farm animal neglect.
- In some instances, removing animals from the farm, without additional support, may cause an animal keeper's health and wellbeing to deteriorate. This dilemma creates challenges for veterinary professionals charged with the responsibility of ensuring animal welfare. Animal welfare interventions may need to be paired, and those enforcing welfare legislation need to be able to have the tools to help channel adequate on-farm support. **On-going monitoring** of the farm situation and collaboration between veterinarian and human-health agencies is essential to reduce to risk of farmer deterioration.
- Research and on-going discussion of **One Welfare** will help strengthen the concept and its implementation. Advocacy at a societal and whole government level is required to translate the concept into policy.

Further reading

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CHAPTER 4

Farmers and farm animal welfare in Ireland

Overview

There is a large body of research in the human-health and social sciences on farmer stress and wellbeing, and in the animal welfare sciences on human-animal relations. However, whilst there is anecdotal information available, there is little interdisciplinary research between both areas of investigation, especially in identifying how farmers' experiences may increase the risk of farm animal neglect. The on-going development of initiatives such as *One Welfare* helps address this gap. As outlined in the opening chapter, two research projects conducted in Ireland in 2009 and 2012 form the backdrop of this report. These projects are presented in more detail in the following chapter.

Research project 1: *Identification of key performance indicators for on-farm animal welfare incidents*

Assessment and monitoring of farm animal welfare are key objectives of the European Union's Animal Welfare Strategy (2008). However, there is an inconsistent approach to the recording of on-farm animal welfare across the European Union. In 2011, Kelly et al. described the results of exploratory research to identify aspects of case study herds investigated by the DAFM for animal welfare incidents. This project sought to identify and validate key performance indicators (KPIs) that could be incorporated into and used to enhance the EWS.

Methodology

A farm animal welfare incident is defined as '*any situation where a person in charge of cattle or sheep causes avoidable pain or suffering to those cattle or sheep, or fails to take steps to prevent avoidable pain or suffering to cattle or sheep under his or her care, or fails to respond expeditiously to cattle or sheep that are experiencing avoidable pain or suffering under his or her care*' (Kelly et al., 2011).

- Senior Superintending Veterinary Inspectors and Superintending Veterinary Inspectors at DAFM identified herds in their region where animal welfare incidents had occurred.
- Eighteen case-study herds were identified. Subsequent data about the animal welfare incident, the animal species and the extent of the problem were compiled alongside general data on the farmer, the farm and the livestock.

Using two national databases operated by DAFM, possible indicators investigated on case cattle farms (where an animal welfare incident had occurred) included:

1. Changes in herd size
2. Late registration of bovine births
3. Numbers of calves registered at herd level per year
4. Unaccounted exits – animals missing from the herd (also referred to as ‘herd unknown’)
5. On-farm burial as a means of carcass disposal (this is now prohibited in Ireland)
6. Knackery disposals (i.e., animals that have either died or been euthanized on-farm due to disease or injury).

KEY RESULTS

- Late registration of calves, use of on-farm burial, a gradual increase in the number of moves to knackeries, and records of animals moved to ‘herd unknown’ were notable on case farms.
- Welfare problems on these farms included high rates of animal mortality and unburied carcasses, issues with animal registration, and poor farm management skills. A history of animal welfare problems was also common.
- Farmers ranged in age from young to old (31 to 84 years) and comprised both males and females. These results debunk stereotypical perceptions of the relationship between animal welfare problems and older, isolated farmers.
- Kelly et al. (2011) observed problematic human experiences behind the case studies (including substance addiction, depression and mental health problems, the death of a parent, and stress related to paperwork) that affected animal welfare.
- There is potential for data capture in the abattoir and knackery, but the value is species-specific. Further evaluation of the effectiveness of KPIs is required.



Research project 2: *Exploring the human element of farm animal welfare incidents in Ireland*

Overview

Research conducted by Kelly et al. (2011) was instrumental in raising important questions about the relationship between problematic human experiences and farm animal neglect in Ireland. Subsequently, Devitt et al. (2015) conducted exploratory social science research into this relationship.

‘Animal welfare indicators can be used as a sign of a farmer being successful or failing to cope, and could be used to detect poor farmer health/wellbeing. Equally, poor farmer wellbeing detected by a medical practitioner could indicate a risk of poor animal welfare on the farm’. (Garcia Pinillos et al., 2016).

Methodology

1. Only closed investigations of animal welfare incidents that took place in 2010 were considered. Cases were randomly selected from the AFIT database.
2. DAFM administered information and invitation letters to the relevant sample.
3. Farmers willing to participate gave consent for their contact details to be shared with the researcher.
4. A total of 82 farmers were invited, and 13 (15%) agreed to participate. Two cases were classified as *serious*, six *less serious*, and five *not serious*.
5. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted. A narrative approach to interviewing allowed farmers to discuss the context in which the farm animal welfare incident occurred on their farm. Data were analysed thematically.

Data protection guidelines and the principles of sensitive research were followed during all stages of the research. The sensitive nature of the research topic created a number of challenges for the research team (see Devitt et al., 2016).

KEY RESULTS

- Some farmers held beliefs regarding what they perceived as appropriate animal welfare standards, i.e., poor standards were often perceived as appropriate and were normalised. Beliefs about animal tolerability, and the financial cost of veterinary care often meant that appropriate animal welfare standards were compromised.
- Age-related (physical) difficulties and a limited availability of farm help affected some farmer's ability to carry out everyday farming activities. For older farmers, these experiences were recalled within the wider context of rural decline and demographic change in Ireland. These farms were associated with less severe animal welfare cases, suggesting poor interactions between farmers and farm animals (see Chapter 3).
- Farmers were often reluctant to ask for farm help or to reduce livestock numbers.
- An inability to cope was reported among farmers who recalled mental health problems. These cases were associated with animal welfare incidents of a more severe nature, suggesting poor human-animal relations (see Chapter 3).
- Compromised animal welfare often coincided with an accumulation of stressful experiences, life changes, or triggers (such as the death of a parent), which undermined coping ability and eroded motivation towards farm management.
- Stories of stress included experiences of ill health, marital and family separation, and financial concerns. Narratives around the unpredictable nature of farming in terms of financial insecurity, animal disease, poor weather conditions, and a feeling of losing control featured widely.
- Farm stressors affect job satisfaction, motivation and work performance, undermining the reciprocal relationship between farmer and good animal welfare.

Recommendations

- Agencies responding to an on-farm crisis need to be aware that **securing farmer health and wellbeing** may be the most important strategy for improving animal welfare. However, *“if the farmers are at the edge of their own well-being and motivation, then carrying out animal welfare-improving actions is probably challenging”* (Kauppinen et al. 2010: 533). For on-farm interventions to be successful, they must address the root cause of the problem, and this may need to be the overall objective of crisis-oriented interventions.
- **Knowing the signs of human and on-farm neglect** can help support professionals identify at-risk farm situations. There is a need for shared learning spaces between veterinary professions, and health, social and community support agencies.
- It is recommended that animal welfare assessments and **interventions be sensitively conducted** (especially at a time of crisis), and involve a helpful, non-confrontational, empathic approach. This approach may require that other agencies, other than or alongside regulatory personnel (for e.g., public health officials, social workers and local support

services, family and community members) be involved during interventions and have the necessary tools that can enable a focus on effective communication and understanding, while ensuring good animal welfare standards.

- During assessment and monitoring, and in attempting to bring about an on-farm resolution in complex cases, agencies working with farmers should **identify important ‘gate-keepers’** who have had positive long-term relationships with the farmer and/or farm families, who are trusted, know the farm situation and are capable of facilitating positive on-farm change. These ‘gate-keepers’ may include the private veterinarian, the local General Practitioner, representative from farming support networks, a church member, family friend or relative.
- Disease outbreaks and weather related or other direct or indirect crises may provide a **timely opportunity to assist at-risk farms**, to highlight support initiatives (such as the EWS, the Farm and Rural Stress helpline), and reinforce targeted messages about farmer wellbeing and animal welfare.

Further Reading

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CHAPTER 5

The Professional Response to Farm Animal Neglect

Overview

The modern food chain relies on a governance system that encompasses processes of standardisation, certification and inspection, and aims to prevent animal disease, ensure animal welfare, and safeguard public health. While all veterinarians provide animal care, food animal veterinarians operate in a more complex web of relationships and interactions. They act as mediators and agents between farm animals and their keepers, between farmers and government, the food industry and agriculture, and between farmers, the livestock sector and consumers. Food animal veterinarians must ‘reconcile very divergent interests’ (Lowe, 2009). Encounters with complex farm animal welfare problems amplify these challenges.

Despite the complex nature of farm animal neglect, the response is often one-dimensional, commencing and concluding with animal welfare agencies only. These agencies typically act alone, their response guided by legislation prohibiting animal neglect and cruelty. This is primarily because complaints to the relevant authorities and concerns typically focus on animals, and because the relevant authorities only have powers under animal welfare related legislation.

Chapter 4 introduced the research projects, which form the basis of this report. In addition to capturing the experiences of farmers (Chapter 4), this research also sought to explore the experiences of veterinary professionals (private veterinary practitioners and government veterinarians) who have responsibility to ensure the welfare of farm animals. Their experiences are reported in the following chapter.

A qualitative research study was conducted to identify:

1. The professional experiences and responses of Irish government veterinarians when responding to farm animal welfare incidents that involve farmers with social, health and psychological-related difficulties.
2. Experiences of government and private veterinarians when forming links with each other, and with social support services on farm animal welfare incidents that involve farmers under pressure.

Methodology

- Government veterinarians were recruited through District Veterinary Offices located nationwide. Private veterinarians were recruited through the Veterinary Council of Ireland.
- Qualitative focus groups were used for data collection with 30 veterinarians (18 government veterinarians and 12 private veterinarians). Data were analysed thematically.

Table 4: Professional dilemmas that exist for government veterinarians when responding to problematic farm animal welfare incidents (Devitt et al., 2014)

Defining professional parameters	Responsibility towards animal welfare (and to the legislation) may be in tension with complex on-farm situations. What should be the appropriate response?
Involvement versus detachment	How do I manage attachment to individual farm cases?
Determining the appropriate response	Am I here to help the animal? Or, am I here to help the farmer? How can I do both?



Key Results

- Private veterinarians have practical dilemmas around what Morgan and McDonald (2007) identify as ‘contextual factors’. These include concerns about reprisals, client confidentiality and losing one’s client, and exposure to the subsequent financial implications (Fig. 3).
- Communication between various actors involved tends to be informal and ad-hoc, driven by individual efforts and personal contacts rather than a structured framework.
- In the absence of guidelines and formal, cross-reporting structures, government veterinarians feel they do not necessarily have the available mechanisms, or professional skills to provide social or emotional support to farmers at-risk. This can create professional uncertainty for government veterinarians.
- There is a need for a coordinated structure for providing advice and confidential cross reporting between government and private veterinarians, and between veterinarian roles, social, and health and community support services.
- Family members, neighbours and local support groups can assist in identifying at-risk situations. These actors should be seen as partners in working towards an on-farm solution.

Understanding the experiences of government veterinarians

‘An important test for a regulatory theory is whether it offers assistance in addressing the challenges that regulators face in practice’ (Baldwin and Black, 2007: 1). Devitt et al. (2014) identify the professional challenges experienced by government veterinarians when responding to complex on-farm situations. Citing Libsky (2010), Anneberg et al. (2014) categorise government veterinary inspectors as *street-level bureaucrats*, similar to other public workers (e.g., teachers, social workers, police officers) who experience dilemmas when having to achieve clearly defined objectives in situations that often require judgment, discretion and improvisation. These professions can apply a degree of discretion in how they enforce the rules, yet certain situations may require initiative and empathy beyond their administrative guidelines.

In the case of farm animal welfare, government veterinarians are expected to implement and ensure compliance with the legislation. In the absence of compliance, the farmer faces the risk of enforcement, although this may undermine long-term on-farm resolution (Table 5). A **responsive approach** to implementation of the legislation would demand that inspectors ‘*have both the time and the skills not only to look at the situation of the animals, but also to listen to the farmer*’ (Anneberg et al., 2013). Such an approach is fundamental to implementation of *One Welfare*, yet may be challenging in a control-system whose main focus is on achieving compliance.

Table 5: Advantages and limitations to prosecution (Source: Patronek & Weiss, 2012)

Advantages of prosecution	Limitations of prosecution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides the ‘teeth’ needed to achieve compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to address serious deficiencies in care until it deteriorates to the level of animal neglect and cruelty.²
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows brokering a broader range of solutions, including prohibitions against future animal ownership or probation without jail time if the person does not reoffend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No way to pro-actively address issues of dangerousness to self or others.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Penalises criminal acts when the elements of a crime can be proved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with mental health problems become criminals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In line with current thinking that cruelty to animals is a serious offense and crimes must be pursued vigorously. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities or non-profits bear considerable costs³ Recidivism remains high even with conviction.

² In other words, a case of compromised animal welfare becomes one of animal cruelty.

³ This can include animal welfare charities.

Recommendations

- The implementation of a **One Welfare information campaign** aimed at targeting first responders, government and private veterinarians, social and health support services could help improve awareness of the complex relationship between farmers under pressure and the potential for farm animal neglect.
- Veterinary professionals have an **ethical and moral responsibility** to seek to ensure animal welfare. This may require that the client/professional ‘confidentiality contract’ be overcome in situations where animal welfare is being compromised and farmer wellbeing is at risk.
- It is recommended that **guidelines on assessment and monitoring** of farmer wellbeing be developed to assist agencies to determine the most appropriate response. Farm animal welfare interventions should be conducted on a **case-by-case approach**. This will help determine whether animal neglect has occurred due to intentional cruelty, poor understanding of animal care, or a psychological, health, or socio-economic problem on the farm. A case-by-case approach will require time, and appropriate skills.
- The **EWS is crucial** to ensuring at-risk farms receive timely support interventions. The current system should be implemented nation-wide, seeking to strengthen working relationships with all current stakeholders including human-health professionals, and farm, family and community support networks. A stronger sense of advocacy of *One Welfare* at government level in a way that facilitates a whole government approach to early intervention will help strengthen the EWS.

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CHAPTER 6

Lines of approach and recommendations for policy makers and practitioners

Overview

Applying the lens of the human-animal relationship, this report outlined the challenges and solutions to supporting farm animal welfare in Ireland. A number of practical recommendations have been provided throughout various sections of the report. The following expands on these to outline recommended lines of approach for veterinarian and health practitioners, and animal welfare and human-health policy makers at various points of intervention. Recommendations will also be of interest to *One Welfare* advocates.



1. Building on-farm capacity: Helping farmers help themselves

Ideally, farmers need to understand the anticipated risks – **occupational, financial, environmental and locational pressures** – associated with farming and farm expansion, the potential consequences for on-farm management, and the importance of personal resilience and self-care.⁴ Farmers need to be aware of what supports are available, and how to avail of these

⁴ There is a role for government agencies, such as Teagasc (Ireland's Agriculture and Food Development Authority), to be involved in foresight planning with farmers who are considering a change in farming practice. Within the *Teagasc Road Maps to Better Farming 2020* (Teagasc, 2013), dairy farmers are warned of the risk of price volatility and external cost exposures, and advised to adopt their farming systems to deal with these risks.

supports if they themselves, other farmers, or farm animals are at risk. **Succession and on-farm contingency planning** may help reduce the risk of animal neglect that may arise as a result of difficulties in farm management among older farmers.

Recommendations:

- A **targeted publicity campaign** (aimed at farmers and service providers) on the importance of positive-mental health, and providing information on available supports may help normalise the role that self-care plays in farming. Communication channels could include the farming press, discussion groups, veterinary practices, agricultural colleges and farming organisations, government and animal health websites, health care settings, and community health centres.
- A **pocket-sized information and contact card** containing the details of support services (human and animal) could be made available at farm-relevant locations, at local health centres, and to personnel involved directly with farmers, including government inspectors. This would help agencies refer vulnerable farmers to the relevant support services, and could be used to encourage and motivate farmers to seek support. Initiatives such as the provision of free health checks at livestock markets and the regional-based HSE-funded Farm and Rural Stress Helpline could be expanded nationwide.
- Cognitive-behavioural interventions targeting the attitudes and behaviour of farmers can enhance human-animal interactions and improve productivity (Hemsworth et al., 2002). It is recommended that the value of cognitive-behavioural interventions in other areas of farm animal production be explored as a means of improving on-farm animal welfare.
- Encourage farmers to **plan their retirement and farm transfer**. Referring to existing resources such as ‘A Guide to Transferring the Family Farm’ (Teagasc, 2015), veterinary practitioners and farm advisors can play an important role in this regard.

2. Minimising the risk: On-farm early intervention and the early warning-system

If supported by a whole government, multi-agency approach⁵, an **Early Warning System** can provide a channel for effective early intervention, minimising the potential for farm animal welfare incidents.⁶ Evaluation, however, is important for helping to identify best practice and areas where improvement is necessary. Although developed in 2004, there has been no official evaluation conducted on the effectiveness of the EWS in Ireland.

⁵ Potential stakeholders include animal welfare and animal care agencies, farming organisations, law enforcement, human health and mental health professions, social services, public health officials, the legal profession, and government departments.

⁶ The EWS can provide useful learning for other initiatives with similar goals, especially as the *One Welfare* concept progresses internationally.

Recommendation: A **SWOT analysis** could provide a useful evaluation tool of the current early warning system. In reviewing the system, helpful objectives could include a characterisation where possible of:

- EWS interventions and their outcomes
- The role and nature of interventions by different actors in the field
- Barriers and opportunities for cooperation
- Training and educational opportunities
- Future threats and opportunities

More broadly, appropriate early intervention necessitates an educational and collaborative framework (e.g., via curricula approaches, learning days, workshops, information material, peer to peer learning) that facilitates awareness building of farmer and farm animal welfare issues, skill development on how to respond, and shared learning across agencies to reduce on-farm risk.

Not all first responders (for e.g., human health or social care supports) will come into direct contact with farm animals. Nevertheless, agencies need to be capable of acting upon their professional duty to inform the relevant authorities if they perceive farmer wellbeing and/or animal welfare to be at-risk. Identifying agencies relevant to early intervention and crisis management, their related responsibilities, and barriers and opportunities to cooperation, is an important step in ensuring the effectiveness of an EWS approach.⁷

Agencies working directly with farmers on animal welfare will also need to facilitate and hold space for involvement of trusted gatekeepers, and enable confidential sharing and collaborative relationships based on mutual trust between agencies.

Recommendations:

- The **EU strategy for Animal Welfare** refers to the need for training of farmers and government veterinarians who inspect farms to help improve compliance with animal welfare regulation. It is recommended that formal and informal education and training opportunities (for farmers and veterinary roles) be reviewed to ensure they support best practice and appropriate skill development in animal welfare, including focus on the relationship between farmers and farm animals.
- The existing EWS should seek to **mainstream a culture of cross-agency collaboration** to reduce the risks to farm welfare, and include veterinarians, animal welfare groups, farming,

⁷ Different agencies may have different responsibilities (i.e., veterinary agencies will advocate for animal welfare and may not collect the type of information necessary to bring about a long-term farm resolution, whereas human health agencies will provide support services to the farmer/farm family, and may advocate that animals remain on the farm). Barriers to cooperation may include the use of different terminology, administrative burdens, cost and training concerns, and conflicting missions.

community and rural networks, as well as organisations involved in human physical and mental health, social support, law enforcement, and environmental protection. These relationships need to be mutually beneficial, resulting in positive outcomes for farmers and farm animals.

- The UK-based Farming Community Network provides a **useful example of a focused, well publicised, coordinated initiative** that provides volunteer-led practical support to farmers to help them ‘find a positive way forward through their problems’ (see: <http://fcn.org.uk/>). In addition to other farming areas, the Network provides assistance with animal health and welfare, and recognises the impact of poor health on farming ability. The Network provides a useful example of what could be developed in Ireland.



Farm animal welfare **assessment and monitoring** are key objectives of the European Community’s Action Plan on Animal Welfare (2009). Animal welfare indicators can be used as pointers to the overall health and wellbeing of the farmer.

- **Recommendation:** Develop further the potential of **key performance indicators**. Investigate the potential use of points along the supply chain for the purpose of detection. For example, the detection of animal welfare problems during transport, or at slaughter could point to wider on-farm problems. Further work could involve greater communication and collaboration across agencies along the supply chain, education and skill development around recognising the signs of poor welfare standards, and compliance with a professional mandate to report signs of animal neglect.

3. Managing an on-farm crisis: When agencies intervene

A **multidisciplinary, collaborative and coordinated approach** to crisis management is an efficient, resourceful and effective way of addressing farm animal neglect.

Formulated guidelines on assessment and monitoring of farmer welfare and farmer ability during crisis situations may help guide intervening agencies and increase the potential for long-term resolution. Guidelines will help build professional confidence, and assist veterinary professionals and other agencies to identify the appropriate response for farmers and farm animals.

In some countries, agencies can request accompaniment and intervention by support personnel, such as a social worker, family support worker, General Practitioner. Each case of animal neglect is unique. In instances of animal hoarding, for example, recommended approaches can be therapeutically focused, cooperative based, or involve prosecution. Well-documented guidance on animal hoarding argues that on-farm cooperation and compliance can be achieved through a

combination of motivation and encouragement (the ‘carrot’) and the threat of enforcement (the ‘stick’).

Recommendations:

- The **development of a task force** may be required depending on farm assessment outcomes and contingency planning – the aim of which will be to develop a concerted plan to help reduce the risk of a deteriorating on-farm situation. The principal agency will need to evaluate if, as an agency, it alone can reduce the risk of an on-farm crisis, or whether a multi-agency approach is required.
- The **HOMES Multi-Disciplinary Hoarding Risk Assessment**⁸ (Table 6 in Appendix 1) provides an assessment tool for professions seeking to measure the level of risk in animal hoarding situations, and to develop a plan of action, whether it is intervention, further assessment, or referral. This Assessment should be considered for its usefulness to on-farm situations in Ireland.
- Guidelines should include **assessment criteria** such as:
 - The intrinsic capacity of the farm situation – the resources available, the level of support, the nature of the farm context;
 - Farmer history – in terms of animal care, training, previous problems, medical/psychological issues;
 - Farmer ability to carry out farming duties – i.e., their self-assessment and recognition of medical/psychological problems, understanding and acknowledgment of cause and effect in animal welfare and information about appropriate animal care, ability to consistently meet the needs of the animal, and ability to show empathy for their animals.

Cross reporting is necessary for multi-disciplinary collaboration (see Table 7 in Appendix 1). Although confidentiality to clients is obligatory throughout veterinary professional code of conduct, confidentiality agreements can be overcome when there is an obligation under the law, and where the interest of the public or of animal welfare is endangered and outweighs the professional obligations to the client. Yet, concerns over confidentiality present a significant barrier to cross-agency collaboration, and more generally, to promoting *One Welfare*.

⁸The Assessment tool can be accessed at: https://vet.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/HOMES_SCALE.pdf (accessed January 2017)

- **Recommendation:** Private practitioners, government veterinarians, and other relevant agencies must be able to **navigate the confidentiality dilemma**, and their professional mandate, without compromising professional and legal responsibilities. Awareness raising and capacity building around adhering to professional requirements must be an integral part of educational training and continued professional development.

In the case of farm animal welfare, government veterinarians are expected to implement and ensure compliance with the legislation. In the absence of compliance, the farmer faces the risk of enforcement, although this may undermine long-term on-farm resolution. A **responsive approach** to implementation of the legislation would demand that veterinary inspectors ‘*have both the time and the skills not only to look at the situation of the animals, but also to listen to the farmer*’ (Anneberg et al., 2013). This approach is fundamental to implementation of *One Welfare*, yet may be challenging in a control-system whose main focus is on achieving compliance. Additional training support tools may be required for veterinary inspectors to help them gain the necessary skills to enable them to deal with such situations.

For assessments to be responsive to specific farm situations, it is essential that agencies have the adequate time, resources and appropriate skills to help determine the underlying reasons for poor welfare standards (i.e., due to self-neglect because of farmer health/social/psychological problems, due to poor attitudes and knowledge gaps in appropriate animal care, or due to an act of intentional cruelty), and approach the situation in a sensitive and empathetic manner if required.

It is also important for government, veterinary bodies and educators to recognise the challenging experiences encountered by agencies who work closest to farmers, i.e., private veterinarians and government veterinarians. While peer support is important, it may not always be available. It is crucial that veterinary professionals feel supported in their role. It is also important that veterinary professionals feel prepared to work with challenging and potentially complex situations.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that educational and training programmes include learning around the use of interviewing tools (such as **Motivational Interviewing**) as a tool for inspectors, private veterinarians and advisors.
- **Continuing Veterinary Education** modules should be provided on self-care, crisis management, conflict resolution, and effective communication skills to support dialogue with at-risk farmers, and multi-agency dialogue with other agencies.

4. Post-crisis management

Post-crisis management will require monitoring and continued assessment that may need to be sensitively oriented according to the needs of the farmer and the farm situation. In some

countries, counselling or mental health assessment is also used as a component of law enforcement in situations where prosecution is being used.

The manner in which the media communicate stories of farm animal neglect may contribute to stigmatising the farmer, increasing the risk of further stress, or simplifying the complexities of the on-farm situation.

Recommendations:

- The feasibility of a **health assessment approach** within an Irish context could be considered. Important variables for consideration include costs, the monitoring of compliance, the required length and frequency of support, counsellors' awareness of the complexity of human-animal relations, and the need for communication between the counsellor and other intervening agencies.
 - A **community support framework** comprising trusted individuals (such as neighbours/family members), support service professionals (local general practitioner, local police, public and mental health supports, veterinary and legal supports) can prove the most effective way of preventing relapse, monitoring and ensuring a long-term resolution, working in collaboration with the farmer on achievable goals to help restore farmer capacity, motivation and willingness.
 - A **protocol to review the outcomes of serious cases** should be considered. Evaluation into the reasons underlying repeat offences could help tailor interventions to suit highly at-risk situations, and help ensure monitoring programmes are effective. It may also be necessary to provide counselling opportunities for veterinary inspectors involved directly and affected by difficult cases.
 - **Briefings between government agencies, farming groups and relevant journalists** on high-profile cases will help ensure that a sensitive approach, that also communicates the complexities, is incorporated into how the media portray farm animal neglect stories.
-

APPENDIX 1: CHAPTER 6 SUPPORTING TABLES

Table 6: The HOMES Multi-Disciplinary Hoarding Risk Assessment. Source: https://vet.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/HOMES_SCALE.pdf (Accessed April 17 2017)

HOMES® Multi-disciplinary Hoarding Risk Assessment
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Instructions for Use</u></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HOMES Multi-disciplinary Hoarding Risk Assessment provides a structural measure through which the level of risk in a hoarded environment can be conceptualized.• It is intended as an initial and brief assessment to aid in determining the nature and parameters of the hoarding problem and organizing a plan from which further action may be taken – including immediate intervention, additional assessment or referral.• HOMES can be used in a variety of ways, depending on needs and resources. It is recommended that a visual scan of the environment in combination with a conversation with the person(s) in the home be used to determine the effect of clutter/hoarding on Health, Obstacles, Mental Health, Endangerment and Structure in the setting.• The Family Composition, Imminent Risk, Capacity, Notes and Post-Assessment sections are intended for additional information about the hoarded environment, the occupants and their capacity/strength to address the problem.

Table 7: Example of a telephone flowchart used by first responders when responding to cases of animal hoarding. Source: <http://vet.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/TFPhoneChart.pdf> (Accessed April 17 2017)

<p>1. LOGIN the report of possible hoarding behaviour. Obtain as much information as possible about the complaint.</p> <p>2. EVALUATE the report to determine which member group should be the PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR for an initial investigation.</p> <p>3. REFER the report to the proper member group or INVESTIGATE the report to determine its validity and severity. Request assistance, if needed, to resolve the issue.</p>		
Does the initial report involve probable child neglect or cruelty? ↓	No/ Yes	Refer to Child Protective Services (contact number) →
Does the initial report involve probable elder neglect or cruelty? ↓	No/ Yes	Refer to Adult Protective Services (contact number) →
Does the initial report involve probable animal neglect or cruelty? ↓	No/ Yes	Refer to Humane Society (contact number) →
Does the initial report involve accumulations of garbage or animal wastes? Is there an odour? Are there insects or rodents? ↓	No/ Yes	Refer to Health District (contact number) →
Does the initial report involve structural problems, tall grass, non-garbage accumulations? ↓	No/ Yes	Refer to Code Enforcement (contact number) →
Does the initial report involve fire code violations in a building with > 3 residential units? ↓	No/ Yes	Refer to local Fire Department (contact number) →
Does the initial report involve probable mental health issues? ↓	No/ Yes	Refer to Mental Health Services (contact number) →

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