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Welfare assessment of horses: the AWIN approach

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Abstract

The EU-funded Animal Welfare Indicators (AWIN) research project (2011–2015) aimed to improve animal welfare through the development of practical on-farm animal welfare assessment protocols. The present study describes the application of the AWIN approach to the development of a welfare assessment protocol for horses (Equus caballus). Its development required the following steps: (i) selection of potential welfare indicators; (ii) bridging gaps in knowledge; (iii) consulting stakeholders; and (iv) testing a prototype protocol on-farm. Compared to existing welfare assessment protocols for other species, the AWIN welfare assessment protocol for horses introduces a number of innovative aspects, such as implementation of a two-level strategy focused on improving on-farm feasibility and the use of electronic tools to achieve standardised data collection and so promote rapid outcomes. Further refinement to the AWIN welfare assessment protocol for horses is needed in order to firstly gather data from a larger reference population and, secondly, enhance the welfare assessment protocol with reference to different horse housing and husbandry conditions.

Keywords: animal-based, animal welfare, horse, indicator, measure, on-farm