



## A Good Life for Farm Animals

### A framework to talk positively about animal welfare on UK farms: identifying, observing and optimising quality of life opportunities and choices for farmed animals

Recent moves within the farming industry are focusing on agroecological and regenerative approaches to farming systems, to boost soil health, improve water quality, increase biodiversity, reduce inputs and climate impact. One of the key principles within this is a focus on the reconfiguration of livestock systems and reintegration of them within agro-ecosystems. As part of this approach, there is a strong focus on ensuring that the animals within these systems have a good quality of life; an ethical concern shared by farmers, consumers and the wider public.

#### *How do we define a Good Life?*

Assessing good farm animal welfare has historically been focused on assessing the negative aspects of welfare, as an important, and necessary first step to ensure an absence of harm. It is now understood that positive experiences are also important for good animal welfare (e.g. pleasurable diet, interesting environment, opportunity to socialise and play) and that they contribute positively to achieving a calm, content, healthy and productive animal. Defra's Animal Welfare Committee, previously the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), considered that a "good life" for farmed animals is a life where positive experiences (positive welfare) far outweigh any negative experiences (negative welfare). They coined the term 'Good Life' in their 2009 report [1], when ranking welfare on an increasing spectrum from a 'life not worth living', through to a 'life worth living' and then up to a 'good life'. If farm animals are given resources that they value and that provide them with positive physical and mental experiences, they will have the opportunity to experience positive welfare and therefore a 'good life'.

The aim of this work is to identify and communicate the opportunities for positive welfare that farm animals have – the freedoms, opportunities and choices within their environment to express their normal behaviours in order to have a good life. This is designed to be in addition to achieving good health and welfare outcomes, ultimately showing that giving farm animals a good life can be practical, profitable and environmentally responsible.

#### *Developing the Frameworks*

Using an expert panel, scientists have produced a framework of the resources needed for each of the opportunities that FAWC and others identified as important for good welfare (Table 1).

Table 1. The generic 'Good Life' opportunities and resource needs for farm animals [2]

<b>Positive Welfare Opportunity for:</b>	<b>Resource need</b>
Comfort	Choice of physical environment
	Choice of thermal environment
	Provision of a safe environment
Pleasure	Food choices/Food enrichment
	Cognitive enrichment/Play opportunities
	Breeding and nurturing experiences
Confidence	Positive experiences with people
	Positive social interactions within herd/flock
Interest	A positively enriched environment
	Enhanced learning opportunities
A Healthy Life	Effective management policy for day-to-day health and welfare
	Positive genetic selection for long term health and welfare
	Promoting a natural body type

From this, species-specific, tiered frameworks for dairy and beef cattle, laying hens, broiler chickens, pigs and sheep have been produced. These contain a list of resources and management practices that have been shown in the scientific literature to produce a positive welfare/behaviour response in that species. These incremental tiers are designed to be above the UK legal baseline and the supporting Defra Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock (e.g. Table 2). Using a participatory approach, these have been refined by farmers, vets and assurance schemes, using their experience to ensure feasibility on farm.

Table 2. An example of one of the tiers within the framework for Dairy Cattle [3]

Positive welfare opportunity of 'Interest' by a positively enriched environment	Cows should be able to experience positive emotional states through cognitive enrichment including novelty and exploration
Welfare +	Are there opportunities for choice between 2 (or more) positively stimulating activities, <b>provided sometimes</b> throughout life? (e.g. hay balls, cardboard boxes, brushes, padded posts, sand pit, hay bales, tree stumps, hedges, tractor tyres, music)
Welfare ++	Are there opportunities for choice between 2 (or more) positively stimulating activities, <b>provided continuously</b> throughout life?
Welfare +++	Are there opportunities for choice between 2 (or more) positively stimulating activities, <b>provided continuously and changed or replenished</b> frequently throughout life? (i.e. between 2 weeks and 3 months)

Developing the frameworks into a practical, user-friendly tool is a key objective of this project, and will be co-designed with farmers as one of the major stakeholders, and end users, of this good life resource. The tool will be tailored to facilitate the sharing of innovation and knowledge between farmers, with a supporting bank of ideas and information.

### **What value can the frameworks bring and to whom?**

The frameworks will provide a practical, evidence-led mechanism for measuring and improving good life opportunities on farm for key stakeholders across the supply chain to utilize and collaborate with. These could include farm assurance schemes, veterinarians and other company and industry assessors.

The benefits of this include:

- ✓ Identifying farms that are going **above and beyond** for the animals in their care
- ✓ A **validated communication and marketing language** for higher welfare claims for all parts of the supply chain
- ✓ A checklist for good life enrichments and opportunities supporting **positive welfare innovation and improvement**
- ✓ **Evidence for targeted funding** for farmers from Government or business investors
- ✓ Where available, provide evidence and positive language to promote UK extensive systems in a welfare and sustainability context

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#### References:

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- [2] Edgar, J.L., Mullan, S.M., Pritchard, J.C., McFarlane, U.J. and Main, D.C., 2013. Towards a 'good life' for farm animals: Development of a resource tier framework to achieve positive welfare for laying hens. *Animals*, 3(3), pp.584-605. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani3030584>
- [3] Stokes, J.E., Rowe, E., Mullan, S., Pritchard, J.C., Horler, R., Haskell, M.J., Dwyer, C.M. and Main, D.C., 2022. A "Good Life" for Dairy Cattle: Developing and Piloting a Framework for Assessing Positive Welfare Opportunities Based on Scientific Evidence and Farmer Expertise. *Animals*, 12(19), p.2540. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12192540>