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A method for the economic valuation of animal welfare benefits using a single welfare score

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Abstract

Unless the benefits to society of measures to protect and improve the welfare of animals are made transparent by means of their valuation they are likely to go unrecognised and cannot easily be weighed against the costs of such measures as required, for example, by policy-makers. A simple single measure scoring system, based on the Welfare Quality® index, is used, together with a choice experiment economic valuation method, to estimate the value that people place on improvements to the welfare of different farm animal species measured on a continuous (0–100) scale. Results from using the method on a survey sample of some 300 people show that it is able to elicit apparently credible values. The survey found that 96% of respondents thought that we have a moral obligation to safeguard the welfare of animals and that over 72% were concerned about the way farm animals are treated. Estimated mean annual willingness to pay for meat from animals with improved welfare of just one point on the scale was £5.24 for beef cattle, £4.57 for pigs and £5.10 for meat chickens. Further development of the method is required to capture the total economic value of animal welfare benefits. Despite this, the method is considered a practical means for obtaining economic values that can be used in the cost-benefit appraisal of policy measures intended to improve the welfare of animals.

Keywords: *animal welfare, benefit valuation, economics, methodology, policy, welfare score*