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To inspect, to motivate — or to do both? A dilemma for on-farm inspection of animal welfare

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Abstract

The ultimate aim of this paper is to study and discuss a central dilemma within inspection of animal welfare. On the one hand, it may be argued that controllers should check only whether farmers comply or not with animal welfare regulation. Here, the key value is the rule of law, and that all offenders should be treated equally. On the other hand, it may be argued that an important component of inspections is to enter into dialogue with farmers. This may be based on a more forward-looking view aimed at motivating farmers to look after the welfare of the animals in their care. In European countries, authorities try to enforce animal welfare legislation through inspections followed up by penalties in instances where a lack of compliance is found. However, the fairness and efficiency, and ultimately the public acceptance of the system, critically depend on the performance of the individual inspector. This paper presents the results of an interview-study into how Danish animal welfare inspectors view their own role and tasks. In the main results, a theme of disagreement presented itself and revealed different attitudes in terms of the possibility of engaging in a dialogue with the farmers. The first theme focused on the preventive aspect. The second had its focus on compliance and on the avoidance of engaging in dialogue with the farmer regarding the reasons for the regulations. Moreover, a theme of agreement showed interpretation as unavoidable. We discuss how the points of view or strategies of the inspectors may affect the outcome of animal welfare inspections, both on a short- and long-term basis. We argue that this study can initiate a necessary and more open discussion of the aforementioned dilemma.

Keywords: animal welfare, control, dilemma, ethic, inspectors' experiences, legislation