

Indicator for DSF Criteria

Animal Care

August 2016

Criteria – *Animal Care*

Strategic Intent – *Dairy Animals are treated with care, and are free from hunger and thirst, discomfort, pain, injury and disease, fear and distress, and are able to engage with relatively normal patterns of animal behavior*

This is an extremely large and challenging area to try and quantify progression, especially when you consider the diversity of dairy production globally.

The Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform (SAI), Dairy Working Group, for the SAI SPA initiative, undertook a review of potential outcome metrics for cattle health and welfare and established a list of six key proxy metrics for health and welfare that could be applied when trying to benchmark or quantify the status of cattle health and welfare. The SAI work was also benchmarked with other key animal health initiatives to ensure alignment and consistency.

Recognizing we are at the early stages of this process, it is proposed to apply just one of these metrics as a proxy indicator for the Animal Care Criteria of the DSF. It is one that is monitored and recorded consistently in global value chains, does not rely on subjective assessment, and the data will provide an excellent indicator for this Criteria.

The DSF Secretariat has taken time to share this concept with a range of animal health specialists and although they would prefer a more robust measure, they recognize that when working globally, these desired indicators are just not feasible and as such are accepting of our proposed indicator.

We are proposing that the indicator that we will apply is Somatic Cell Count (SCC).

What is Somatic Cell Count?

The Somatic Cell Count is a key indicator of milk quality as the majority of these cells are white blood cells, which become present in increasing numbers as an immune response to an infectious organism, predominantly a mastitis causing pathogen.

The SCC is quantified by calculating the number of cells present per milliliter of milk.

Essentially a lower SCC indicates a better animal health as the SCCs originate from within the animal's udder.

Why choose the Somatic Cell Count as a proxy indicator for cattle health?

As indicated above the SCC is an indicator of the animal's overall general health even though the expression of infection is predominantly within the udder.

In addition to this key point, SCC is measured in the majority of dairying regions globally as farmers are often rewarded financially for a low herd SCC and penalized for high readings.

This means that the DSF will be able to more easily access the data and, as it is recorded in a standardized manner, the aggregation of global data will be relatively straight forward.

There is no other animal health and welfare proxy that is both indicative and accessible as the SCC.

Who will need to provide this indicator report?

Implementing members who have indicated that they plan to undertake activities under the Animal Care Criteria.

When does the reporting process start?

When the DSF is notified that the Implementing Member is to pursue activities under this Criteria, they are requested to provide the last 12 months average SCC and the range from the supply base they are working with. This provides the DSF with the 'starting point' for the member.

How often will the Indicator Report need to be provided?

After the provision of the initial (starting point) figures, a report is required of the same (average and range) each December.

How will the data be used?

The DSF intends to communicate publically the progress of the sector under each of the DSF Criteria.

Once data has been received from the Implementing Member, it will be aggregated with data provided by other members working under the Animal Care Criteria to paint a picture of progress for the group.

No individual member will be exposed by this process, although the DSF wants to be as transparent as possible in the reporting of aggregated figures.

What if Somatic Cell Count is not measured?

The DSF would like to understand what measures are used (if any). The Secretariat will work with the member in ascertaining if there is a way to have these incorporated into the proposed reporting mechanism.

Please make contact with the DSF Secretariat if this is the situation for you.