

**Sustaining Animal Health and Food Safety in Organic Farming (SAFO)
EU Concerted Action QRLT – 2001 – 02541**

**PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE FOR ANIMAL HEALTH IN ORGANIC FARMING:
MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE SAFO NETWORK**

**SUMMARY OF 5th SAFO WORKSHOP
1 June 2006, at Odense, Denmark**

Overall aim and specific objectives of SAFO

The objective of the EU-funded SAFO network project is to improve animal health and food safety in organic livestock production systems in existing and pre-accession countries of the European Union. This happens through exchange and active communication of research results and conclusions between researchers, policy makers, farmers and the wider organic stakeholder community, including consumers.

Overview of fifth SAFO Workshop

65 delegates from 23 countries attended the 5th and final SAFO Workshop. The Workshop was held in Odense as one of the satellite meetings attached to the European Joint Organic Congress (30-31 May 2006), which attracted over 1000 participants. The programme for the SAFO Workshop included a review of the activities and messages from the SAFO project, placed in the context of the current discussion on the revision of the EU Regulation 2092/91, and a discussion of the role that formal assessment of animal health and welfare could play in organic livestock certification. SAFO was also involved in organising Topic 3: 'Animal husbandry, health, welfare and food quality' in the Joint Organic Congress. In the three related topics 65 papers were presented that can be found at http://orgprints.org/view/projects/int_conf_joint2006.html.

1. Plenary Session 1: Outcomes of the SAFO Project and Revision of EU Regulation

Report on SAFO Roadshows in new and pre-accession EU Member States

David Younie presented a report on the five SAFO Roadshow seminars held during 2005 in Latvia, Hungary, Slovakia/Czech Republic, Estonia and Romania. In addition to the Roadshows, the 3rd SAFO Workshop was held in Poland, emphasising the major focus which the SAFO project had on new Member States. The objectives of the Roadshow seminars were to disseminate information from the project, and to discuss and identify major issues relating to organic animal health and food safety in these countries. The target audience were organic livestock producers, policy makers, certification body representatives, advisers and veterinarians, and researchers. All six Roadshow countries were characterised by the fact that organic livestock production was a relatively young and immature sector but increasing very rapidly in recent years. Lack of a home market was highlighted as the main constraint for improving the conditions of animals on organic farms in all the Roadshows. It results in a lack of locally accessible approved processing facilities. All countries reported a limited advisory provision for organic farmers including a lack of knowledgeable veterinarians. There were common certification non-compliances in the areas of livestock housing, non-availability of organic replacements and organic feeds, and with parallel production of organic and non-organic livestock on the same farm.

Recommendations of the SAFO Standard Development Working Group

Albert Sundrum presented recommendations from SAFO for future development of the EU Organic Regulation in relation to livestock production. He highlighted the degree of diversification in livestock systems across Europe, and the fact that development of organic livestock production

lagged behind that of crop production. It appears that the status of animal health in organic farming is comparable to conventional farming, i.e. it is not significantly better. The differences between individual farms appear to be greater than those between organic and conventional systems, the most important source of variation being the farm management. Conversion plans often do not cover the livestock enterprises and there is a lack of training and education of farmers in preventive health management on organic farms. Often veterinarians, consultants and inspectors also do not have sufficient training in preventive health management and alternative treatment options. The Standard Development Working Group recommended that

- A strong principle of animal health highlighting the need for preventative measures should be included in the EU-Regulation.
- The EU-Regulation should provide more specific guidelines and clarification on preventative measures.
- Each organic livestock enterprise should produce an animal health plan.
- There is a need to focus on health output through animal based assessment
- Certification bodies should establish a regular monitoring system for animal health data.

Revision of EU Regulation 2092/91

Kim Holm Boesen from Unit F5 of DG Agriculture in the European Commission presented a paper describing the background to the revision of the EU regulation on organic production, particularly in the context of organic livestock and some of the key messages from the SAFO project. He described how a new Regulation was necessary in order to rationalise and clarify the existing Regulation. The scope of the proposed revision now includes aquaculture, which was not included previously. Alluding to the recommendations from the SAFO Standard Development Group, he indicated that the current version of the revision contained a requirement that personnel keeping livestock should 'have the necessary competence and knowledge', and that 'high animal welfare' is now directly one of the Objectives. He indicated that the technical standards (Annex I to VIII) in Reg. 2092/91 would be transferred to the new Regulation without change, except where it was necessary to bring them into line with other more recent Community legislation. There would in the future be reviews of the positive lists (of inputs i.e. Annex VI), with help from the Expert Group as foreseen in the European Action Plan on Organic Food and Farming, but this awaits both the adoption of the Regulation and the research project on Input Evaluation/Criteria. The same approach will be used for new substances on Annex II. In relation to the key message from SAFO about the need to take diversity of livestock systems into account, he highlighted, in particular, the element of flexibility of the production rules (Article 16) which was proposed to be introduced into the revised Regulation. However, this would be linked to a clarification in the approach to the issuing of derogations i.e. certification bodies in general should not in future have the power to issue derogations – 'common but exceptional rules' (Article 16) would generally be under the control of the national Competent Authority (normally the Member State), and issued within agreed Community guidelines.

2. Plenary Session 2:

Animal Health and Welfare in Organic Certification, using Animal-Based Parameters

Tina Leeb from the Austrian University of Agricultural Sciences set the scene for this session. She firstly described why assessment of animal welfare is required in organic certification (see comments above on the minimal difference in health and welfare between organic and conventional livestock). Secondly she described the various ways in which welfare can be assessed, for example by using input-based systems such as the ANI/TGI index system which assesses the suitability of housing conditions, by using outcome-based parameters including quantitative animal measurements (e.g. body condition, skin lesions, flight distance) or qualitative assessments (e.g. generation of terms describing behaviour and/or feelings of the herd/individual). She thirdly discussed how well these various methodologies met the requirements of a good assessment

parameter in terms of validity, practicability and reliability. She concluded that although some input-based parameters should be included in an assessment system, it was preferable that such a system could and should primarily comprise outcome-based parameters, both quantitative and qualitative.

There then followed three short presentations from representatives of organic certification bodies, who described their experiences of animal health and welfare assessment during the certification process.

Ian Rogerson of Soil Association Certification (UK) described how the Bristol Welfare Assurance Programme (BWAP) of Bristol University (exists only for cattle, pigs and poultry at present) had been introduced in the Soil Association certification procedure. Initially a small group of inspectors had been trained in the use of this Programme but now all inspectors as well as office staff had received training and elements of the programme have been introduced to all inspections. The system is being operated in partnership with Bristol University. Inspectors assess and report on specific parameters where there are areas of concern at the annual inspection. The BU Residency Vet is involved not only in training staff but also in accompanying the inspectors on 'difficult' inspections and working with office staff in the reviewing of health plans or discussions with the farmer's veterinarian. The assessment system will continue to be used in follow-up inspections where concerns have been raised, but it is also hoped that in future routine welfare assessments will be made on all poultry, pig and cattle farms. There are some problems to overcome however, including the need to ensure consistency of assessment across the 40 inspectors, the length of time of inspections, the cost of training and inspection and the protocol for dealing with any identified welfare problems.

Matthias Link is a veterinarian who acts as an adviser for the Bioland certification body in Germany. He described two projects being implemented on assessment of animal health and welfare on organic farms. The first is a federal project involving four institutes plus Bioland, in which a) checklists to evaluate health and welfare are being developed and tested and b) animal health plans are being developed and tested. The second project is a project specific to Bioland in which a short checklist is being developed for use by the certification body (with requirement for a subsequent report to Bioland in the case of major problems of animal health and welfare), and secondly a 'Manual of Health Management' for organic advisers is being produced. This includes a 'traffic light' system of assessment of health and welfare (green = good, amber = satisfactory, red = deficiencies present). This manual also contains comprehensive information on how to achieve good health and welfare status (preventative strategies, housing design, etc) so will be a useful tool for education of farmers also.

Elita Selegovska, SAFO representative in Latvia, is an inspector for the Certification & Testing Centre (one of the two certification bodies in Latvia). She described the main problems relating to certification of organic livestock in Latvia. These were a lack of organic feed (which might cause many organic farmers to cease organic certification), non-compliances with unsuitable housing (including tethering of stock, even at pasture), poor documentation, and lack of access to range for poultry, particularly in winter. No animal-based assessment of health and welfare is undertaken during organic inspections, because there is a statutory requirement for this on all farms, including conventional farms, which is carried out by the State Veterinary Service.

3. Working Group Discussions

Three Working Group Discussions were held in parallel during the Workshop.

The Standard Development Group discussed the revision of the Regulation. This discussion provided a forum for many clarifying questions about the Commission proposal and focused on whether specific issues (e.g. scope, a principle on preventative health management, the obligation for an animal health plan) should be included as integral elements of the EU Regulation, or whether they should be legislated for at Member state level.

A second group discussed the integration of assessment of animal health and welfare into the certification process. It is important to remember that whatever is contained within the legislation, the Regulation itself does not deal with implementation of standards. In practice there is wide variation in implementation within and between certification bodies, regions and countries. Thus even if a requirement to assess animal welfare was introduced into the Regulation, there would be questions over its implementation. There is a need to find a mechanism for minimising this variation (e.g. the Certification Bodies Technical Working Group (CBTWG) in the UK, which meets regularly to discuss standards implementation issues). Some members of the Group seriously questioned the need for mandatory welfare assessment (e.g. Latvia situation described above).

The third group discussed advisory provision in relation to animal health and food quality. The Group agreed that there was a big need to implement animal health plans in all countries, (although they also felt that compulsory health plans should not be a part of the Regulation), that there was a need to offer training in organic animal husbandry to advisers, vets and farmers, that it would be desirable to develop a simple health plan that could be applied in all countries and that a database of good, simple health plans should be established.

4. Closing address: Key messages from the SAFO Project

Mette Vaarst, Coordinator of SAFO, closed this final SAFO Workshop with a review of the key messages from SAFO. She highlighted some of the physical outcomes: five Workshops with 81 oral and 39 poster presentations, plus associated Workshop proceedings (in English), and Workshop summaries (in 18 languages) with published papers in national journals; five Roadshows and Roadshow report; three participant consultations and standard development reports and recommendations.

Several very consistent messages became apparent through this comprehensive networking process:

- The diversity in physical and social conditions, and hence livestock systems, was clearly demonstrated. This limits the possibility for technology transfer from region to region, and means that it is quite difficult to create a harmonised Regulation.
- The implementation of the organic standards at farm level do not always reach the high ideals of the organic principles. This occurs both in countries with a long history and those with a short history of organic farming.
- In relation to food quality, SAFO has differentiated the concept of ‘process quality’ (i.e. quality aspects related to the method of production) and ‘product quality’ (i.e. the intrinsic quality of the product itself). Although organic farming normally always has a high process quality, some aspects of this (e.g. outdoor life for poultry) may have a negative impact on product safety/quality (e.g. because of increased exposure to environmental contaminants or pathogens).
- To overcome these deficiencies, organic farmers need to take strong ownership of organic values, and to strive to achieve consciousness and harmony by meeting both the immediate practical goal of financial viability and also the organic principles.
- In practical terms there is a need for further improvement in the Regulation in relation to animal health and welfare, the introduction of animal health plans, improvements in certification procedures, and especially in training of farmers/advisers/veterinarians in preventative health strategies.

The full proceedings of the 5th SAFO Workshop will be made available, as are the four previous Workshop proceedings, on the SAFO website: www.safonetwork.org.

David Younie
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