

Real Welfare: What's in it for me?

Real Welfare has now been a fact of life for some time and its aims are unchanged, though there have been changes in how the results are achieved. There were some issues that needed addressing. Following a structural review of the Real Welfare protocol, involving input from key stakeholders such as vets, producer, processors and Red Tractor, a number of changes have been made and revisions are still ongoing. Please visit the AHDB Port Real Welfare website for more information: <http://pork.ahdb.org.uk/health-welfare/welfare/real-welfare/>



The main aims of Real Welfare remain:

Farm

- Record indicators for pig welfare
- Monitor changes
- Help identify areas for welfare improvements.

Industry

- Provide evidence of welfare standards
- Demonstrate welfare standards to the consumer
- Support the industry.

Some people may still have concerns about Real Welfare, particularly what's in it for them. Below we have addressed some frequently heard comments:

“I already have excellent welfare and productivity on my unit, why should I pay to demonstrate something I already know?”

Most units already have good standards of welfare - it is something our industry is very proud of; however, what you don't know is how your unit compares to others. Results from Real Welfare enable you to benchmark yourself against all other pig units across the industry. The welfare of your pigs may well be good but how does it compare to standards that others are achieving? The systematic way of assessing pig welfare in the Real Welfare scheme allows you to identify potential areas for further enhancement. Also, the anonymous results generated from all Real Welfare assessments, on all Red Tractor Assured units, can be used to demonstrate to our customers the industry's commitment to welfare. We know we have good welfare but do the supermarkets or the shopper in the store? Real Welfare is the means of supporting this commitment made by the industry.

“I see my pigs every day. I shouldn't have to pay my vet an extra three hours each year to look at them.”

We agree that you know the condition of your pigs better than anyone. But rather than simply **seeing**, Real Welfare assessments offer the opportunity to **systematically** observe. Having your vet observe your pigs for welfare outcomes offers a chance for a fresh pair of eyes, as well as allowing you to see developments over time. While you may see your pigs every day, your attention might frequently be drawn to jobs that need doing. Real Welfare ensures that a certain amount of time is dedicated solely to assessing welfare systematically. And because every vet has been trained to assess welfare outcomes in the same way as all other vets, the results are comparable between units

“Why can't I do the Real Welfare protocol myself? Or my stockman?”

A key feature of the Real Welfare protocol is that it is a standardised method. Standardisation ensures that the method is repeatable, results are directly comparable and there is not opportunity for bias. To maintain this standardisation, those carry out the Real Welfare protocol must undergo training. Vets are in an excellent standardisation, those carrying out the Real Welfare protocol must undergo training. Vets are in an excellent position to do the assessments, as they know both your unit and see others like yours. They are in a good position to give advice when and where needed. Relying on vets to carry out the Real Welfare assessments means that measurements are likely to be more consistent. We would however, be pleased to offer training material to any producer of stockman wanting to do assessments themselves (although this will not negate the need for a vet to do the assessments to satisfy Red Tractor Pig Scheme requirements).

“I don't see how Real Welfare benefits the industry.”

Consumers are becoming increasingly interested in welfare and retailers are of this. If Real Welfare had not been introduced in April 2013, pressure to implement similar schemes is likely to have come from the supermarkets anyway. By developing a nationwide scheme we have unified the industry under a single scheme, which we believe is better than having a number of similar, but slightly different schemes in place. Also, we know that, as an industry we have optimum standards of pig welfare but this doesn't mean we should rest on our laurels. Progress is essential to remain competitive. Measuring and monitoring welfare using the Real Welfare scheme will help push the industry forward in terms of raising the bar of welfare standards.

“Real Welfare is just more red tape and cost.”

Yes there is a cost involved but investment in the welfare of our pigs is vital to the survival of the industry and protection of the premium your pork attracts. Assured British pork currently enjoys a price premium, varying between 12p and 40p per Kg between January 2015 and February 2016. Identification of welfare issues as a result of Real Welfare may require some changes to be made on your farm but the consequent benefits to welfare and productivity will warrant the effort and cost.

“I already comply with welfare legislation”

We don't deny that this is the case. What is important to remember is that there is a difference between inputs and outcomes. Fulfilling the legislative tick-box of building, ventilation, nutrition and management requirements (INPUTS) is one thing but pigs may still show signs of their being a problem with their environment (OUTCOMES), Real Welfare enables you to identify instances where the system is not fulfilling the pig's needs even where you have met all legislative requirements. Methods of evaluating welfare are currently being explored by the European Commission and it intends to adopt a more outcome-based approach to animal welfare, such as that used by Real Welfare. This shows that we are moving in the right direction and our industry will be well placed to meet any future legislative requirements that come out of the EU.