

# CIRCULAR INFORMATIVA

**Código:** 06 - 22 / WELFAIR®

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**Destinatarios:** Scheme Manager y Auditores de las Entidades de Certificación

**ASUNTO:** Certificación WELFAIR® para las Azores

Debido a las condiciones específicas de la Región Autónoma de las Azores (en portugués: Região Autónoma dos Açores), Welfair® ha considerado necesario adaptar la interpretación de los Checklists de legislación y de los Protocolos Welfare Quality para vacuno en esta región. A continuación, podrán encontrar los puntos y criterios a tener en cuenta durante las auditorias en esta región.

**En vigor a partir del:** de forma inmediata a partir del envío de la presente circular.

Atentamente,

**Departamento técnico Esquema de Certificación Welfair®**

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## WELFAIR certification for the AZORES:

Due to the specific conditions of the Azores, Welfair® need to adapt the interpretation of the legislation checklist and Welfare Quality Protocols for cattle in this region. In relation to this, please take into account all the next points.

### 1. WQ PROTOCOL ADJUSTMENTS

This will be needed because different husbandry systems currently operate in Azores. Small adaptations are needed to ensure feasibility and soundness of the results.

#### 1.1. Movable milking parlour



Figure 1 - Example of the infrastructures and milking of a movable milking parlour.

Farms that have many small paddocks quite far from each other, will regularly move its milking parlour to an area close to where the cows are at pasture. This means that cows are 100% of the time at pasture. They are brought to a fenced area next to the parlour and then released back to the field. In this area they are jammed together, and a lot of agonistic behaviours may happen. Water is also provided in a movable trough and concentrate is given when being milked. This is a very common system in all islands.

#### Adapted protocol for farms with movable milking parlour

Action or Indicator	Where and when
Random selection	The randomly selected animals for clinical examination will be marked with spray on the lumbar region when being milked.
Lameness	Lameness will be scored (0, 1 or 2) when cows leave the milking parlour and walk to pasture. If possible they should walk on an even, non-slippery and not-muddy path. If they are closed in a paddock for some time after milking and then taken by a road or path to a distance pasture, the marked cows should be scored along this way.
Flight distance	When back in the pasture, a sample of cows should be approach and the distance at which they retreat is registered.
QBA	QBA is applied for 20 minutes when all the animals are at pasture (should only start 5 minutes after the Flight Distance test.
Behaviour	For 120 minutes look for agonistic behaviours, time to lie down, collision, coughs etc... If the field and the number of cows are very large, the area can be divided in segments and the observation time divided between them.
Clinical examination	The selected and marked animals are scored for cleanliness, injuries, disease signs etc... If cows are lying down for the entire observation period, they should be forced to get up. The auditor must have binoculars to clearly see in detail the cows.
Resource measures	Exam the water troughs available on the pasture (availability, linear size, cleanliness...)
Interview farmer	Normal

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## 1.2. Fixed parlour with roofed feeding area

Animals are brought in some minutes before milking and have access to a feed trough where silage, haylage or TMR is provided. Then they are closed in a waiting area for milking. When they leave the milking parlour they still have access to the feed trough. Most farms will have the gate open so that they can return to pasture at will and some will leave this gate open after afternoon milking so that animals can stay inside or come in during the night (to feed or to look for shelter).



Figure 2 Example of the infrastructure and feeding space to a farm with fixed parlour and roofed feeding area

Adapted protocol for farms with fixed parlour and roofed feeding area – it is very similar to the previous one except that lameness will be assessed in the concrete floor roofed area after milking. Also some difference in water assessment.

Action or Indicator	Where and when
Random selection	The randomly selected animals for clinical examination will be marked with spray on the lumbar region when being milked.
Lameness	Lameness will be scored (0, 1 or 2) in the feeding area after milking. The floor in this area is usually concrete and even and not very slippery.
Flight distance	When back in the pasture, a sample of cows should be approached and the distance at which they retreat is registered.
QBA	QBA is applied for 20 minutes when all the animals are at pasture (should only start 5 minutes after the Flight Distance test).
Behaviour	For 120 minutes look for agonistic behaviours, time to lie down, collision, coughs etc... If the field and the number of cows are very large, the area can be divided in segments and the observation time divided between them.
Clinical examination	The selected and marked animals are scored for cleanliness, injuries, disease signs etc... If cows are lying down for the entire observation period, they should be forced to get up. The auditor must have binoculars to clearly see in detail the cows.
Resource measures	Exam the water troughs available on the pasture (availability, linear size, cleanliness...) Exam the water troughs in the feeding area where cows stay for a few hours every day (before and after milking). These water troughs will not be used as the worst scenario for classification, but will have to have clean water (at least score "partially clean"). If this is not the case, it will penalize in the category of water cleanliness.
Interview farmer	Normal

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### 1.3. Fixed milking parlour with roofed feeding and resting area (with or without stalls)

Similar to the previous system, but cows will be kept for some hours in the roofed area. Usually cows will be kept in after evening milking and released to pasture after morning milking. May be the opposite in summer to reduce heat stress and because pasture are in poorer conditions. The time inside can go from 8 to 16 hours a day.

If they are inside for more than 12 hours a day, the protocol should be applied to the cows inside the barn (original WQ protocol). If they are kept for less than 12 hours, the protocol will be the same as the previous one – only look at lameness and water troughs in the barn and the rest of the indicators are collected with the animals at pasture.



*Figure 3 Example of the infrastructure of farms with fixed milking parlour and roofed feeding/resting area*

#### Option 1 – when at pasture most of the day (more than 12 hours)

Action or Indicator	Where and when
Random selection	The randomly selected animals for clinical examination will be marked with spray on the lumbar region when being milked.
Lameness	Lameness will be scored (0, 1 or 2) in the feeding area after milking. The floor in this area is usually concrete and even and not very slippery.
Flight distance	When back in the pasture, a sample of cows should be approach and the distance at which they retreat is registered.
QBA	QBA is applied for 20 minutes when all the animals are at pasture (should only start 5 minutes after the Flight Distance test).
Behaviour	For 120 minutes look for agonistic behaviours, time to lie down, collision, coughs etc... If the field and the number of cows are very large, the area can be divided in segments and the observation time divided between them.
Clinical examination	The selected and marked animals are scored for cleanliness, injuries, disease signs etc... If cows are lying down for the entire observation period, they should be forced to get up. The auditor must have binoculars to clearly see in detail the cows.
Resource measures	Exam the water troughs available on the pasture (availability, linear size, cleanliness...) Exam the water troughs in the feeding area where cows stay for a few hours every day (before and after milking). These water troughs will be used as the worst scenario for classification. This means that the worst scenario will define the final score.
Interview farmer	Normal

Option 2 – when inside most of the day (at pasture less than 12 hours) – use the original WQ protocol when the animals are inside.

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## 2. TIED ANIMALS

It is very frequent to see small calves and other growing animals permanently tied in the field without any shelter. This “cultural” habit results from two factors: 1) mild weather all year round; 2) lack of physical structures (e.g. barns) in most dairy farms with movable milking parlour and small scale family run farms.

The Azores are considered ultra-peripheral region by the EU which this gives them the power to alter specific laws based on their culture. “Animals tied when grazing” is written on their “culture document”. Thus, it is accepted by the local authorities and even said to be of “cultural importance”. However, this practice should be phased out although taking into account that changes will have to be gradual and workable.

### 2.1. Dairy calves (from 0 to 60 days).



*Figure 4 Calf in tied by the neck with a metal chain*

The aim of Welfair® is to increase the welfare of these animals by enforcing some conditions and at the same time start the movement onto the abolition of this practice.

- Conditions
  - Calves should be fed with over 6 litres of milk per day (3 litres twice a day). Farmers should describe the way they work and declare that they do feed at least 6 litres per day.
  - From 1<sup>st</sup> May to 30<sup>th</sup> October water should also be available all day.
  - In case of very harsh climate, animals should be removed and housed.
  - When available in the area, calves must be tied next to trees, bushes, stone walls etc...
  - Calves may be tied temporarily if they are kept with the dam, when she is taken to milking.
  - They should be moved to paddocks with electric fencing or other similar system as soon as possible.
  
- Derogation time-table.
  - During 2022-2023 farms should look for ways to shelter these calves using some sort of barn, buildings or igloos in the field.
  - From 1 January 2024 all farms with more than 50 calves born on farm have to provide this shelter.
  - From 1 January 2025 all other farms must provide shelter and eliminate animals permanently tied as is demanded by European legislation.

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### 2.2. Tied breeding bulls and fattening animals

Having breeding bulls or fattening animals tied all day should be phased-out. After 1 January 2024, keeping cattle tied all their life should be prohibited.

A derogation can be in place for 2022 and 2023, but only with the following conditions:

- Animals can only be tied by a non-traumatic neck collar.
- Water and feed has to be available all day.
- Injured or sick animals have to be sheltered until full recovery.
- It is completely prohibited to have animals tied by a nose ring or by the feet. It is considered a non-compliance and the certification cannot be given to the other animals in the farm.



*Figure 5 Fattening animals tied by the horns on pasture*



*Figure 6 Example of a fattening animal tied with a log on the front right leg*

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## 3. SUCKLER HERDS AND FATTENING CATTLE KEPT AT PASTURE.

An adapted Welfare Quality protocol for beef cattle is applied to these animals, following the normal sequence. If animals are finished in intensive fattening units but only during a small percentage of their lifetime, the source herd has to be audited.



Figure 7 Suckler herd in Terceira, Azores

### Adaptation of the protocol for suckler herds and fattening cattle kept at pasture

Action or Indicator	Where and when
Flight distance	In the pasture, a sample of cows should be approach and the distance at which they retreat is registered. If not possible, worst case scenario, should be applied.
QBA	QBA is applied for 20 minutes when all the animals are at pasture (should only start 5 minutes after the Flight Distance test.
Behaviour	For 120 minutes look for agonistic behaviours, time to lie down, collision, coughs etc... If the field and the number of animals are very large, the area can be divided in segments and the observation time divided between them.
Clinical examination	The selected and marked animals are scored for cleanliness, injuries, disease signs etc... If animals are lying down for the entire observation period, they should be forced to get up. The auditor must have binoculars to clearly see in detail the cows.
Lameness	Lameness will be scored (0, 1 or 2), On the most solid area of the pasture.
Resource measures	Exam the water troughs available on the pasture (availability, linear size, cleanliness...) Exam the water troughs in the feeding area where animals stay for a few hours every day (before and after milking). These water troughs will not be used as the worst scenario for classification, but will have to have clean water (at least score "partially clean") or will penalize for the category water cleanliness.
Interview farmer	Normal

## 4. FATTENING ANIMALS IN INTENSIVE FEEDLOTS.

All facilities that receive animals with more than 200kg, should be audited.

However:

- i) Auditing the farm of origin is not necessary if:
  - The animals lived all their previous life under an extensive system and were weaned no longer than 30 days prior to entering the feedlot;
  - The animals did not stay elsewhere between weaning and entering the feedlot.
- ii) Auditing the farm of origin or transition facilities is necessary if:
  - Animals were weaned longer than 30 days prior to moving to the feedlot;

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- Have spent more than 30 days elsewhere between weaning and entering the feedlot;
- Are more than 200kg and spent any time on a non-extensive farm.

All adults (e.g. cows, bulls) that will provide welfare certified meat have to come from audited farms and slaughter facilities in the correct proportions. At the farm the dams and older bulls must be assessed by an independent audit to the growing animals, although the same protocol is used.

In the slaughterhouse an unique audit is performed, but must contain old and young animals in the correct proportions at the arrival, at lairage, during driving, stunning and carcass analysis.

## **5. WATER PROVISION AT PASTURE:**

Regarding water provision, there are three main sources of concern:

a) The quality of the water, based on the Portuguese law you should give annually-tested water to the animals. This will not be possible to achieve in the Azores since a considerable amount of the water comes from natural sources such as rain and creeks.

b) Some water troughs are attached to large cisterns, this obviously alters the flow but will usually be checked and refilled regularly.

c) Some water troughs do not have flow but they are very large.

Proposal from Welfair®:

**Consider this situation ok based on the flow of the troughs and quantity of water enough for a cow to take water without efforts.**

## **6. SHELTER FOR SICK ANIMALS:**

The current legislation requests that we should have a specific place for sick animals and it should be possible to safely access and treat them. This may not be the case in several farms with mobile milking-parlour.

Welfair® Solution: Request on a timeline similar to the one used for the calves that at least in one of the farmer' yard there is an infirmary. This shelter should be at walking distance, or a sick animal transportation protocol approved by the veterinarian, should be available.

- During 2022-2023 farms should look for ways to shelter these calves using some sort of barn, buildings or igloos at least in one of the farmer' yard.



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- From 1 January 2024 all farms with more than 50 animals have to provide this shelter that should be at walking distance, or a sick animal transportation protocol approved by the veterinarian should be available.
- From 1 January 2025 all other farms must provide this shelter that should be at walking distance, or a sick animal transportation protocol approved by the veterinarian should be available.

### **7. BEDDING FOR CALVES HOUSED IN BOXES**

Premises:

- a) Azores is a ultraperipheral region of Europe
- b) Very limited access to bedding material – straw and sand are very expensive and all the sub-products of the wood industry are very limited.
- c) The current Portuguese legislation DL48/2001 and the European legislation states that all the calves with less than 2 weeks should have bedding. However, practical solutions should be sought out and applied so that the welfare of calves is guaranteed but viability of the farm is not jeopardized.

Current situation:

The calves kept in boxes are either on wood or concrete slats or on solid concrete, with no or very little bedding.



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There are farms that have made immense improvements and fulfil all current demands. Straw, saw-dust or rubber mats are being used in igloos, adapted igloos or conventional boxes.

Welfair® proposal:

2023 – all the farms are advised that they need to replace the current practice and have bedding for calves at least until the age of 2 weeks.

2024- farms with more than 100 calves per year have to demonstrated evidences of providing bedding to calves at least until the age of 2 weeks.

2025- farms with more than 50 calves per year have to demonstrated evidences of bedding for calves at least until the age of 2 weeks.

2026 – All the farms have to demonstrated evidence of bedding for calves at least until the age of 2 weeks.

Bedding with deep straw or deep saw-dust should be recommended but due to the difficulties listed above, alternatives may be accepted. These are: slats covered by rubber or the entire box floor covered by solid rubber mat with some saw-dust over it.

Another acceptable solution is keeping calves outside in groups but with a movable barn so that calves can lie on grass but being protected from wind, rain or sun.