

# WELFUR

## SCIENCE-BASED ANIMAL WELFARE ASSESSMENT



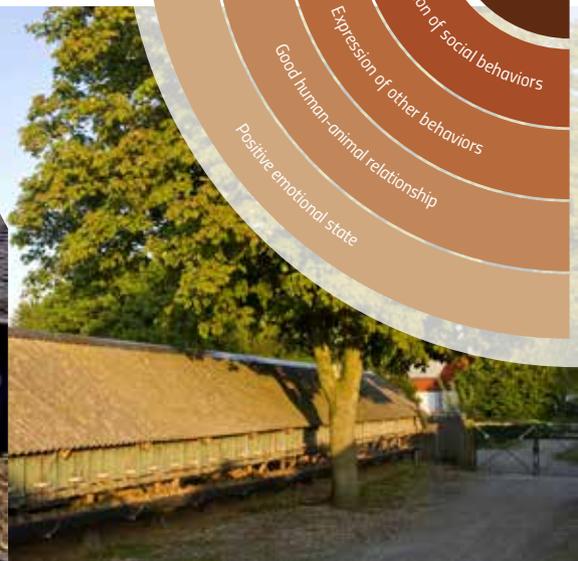
# Practical use of WelFur

The strength of WelFur as an animal welfare assessment system is the comprehensive approach to animal welfare which is measured methodologically and from various angles. At present, animal welfare assessment on European fur farms is typically performed by national authorities who mainly look for compliance with legislation. However, the levels of control and the basic legislation differ considerably from one European country to another. In the first year, three farm assessments are performed in order to establish a baseline welfare status for the individual farm. When the baseline is established, only one farm assessment is held per year, but in three consequent years the assessment is performed during each of the three different periods in order to evaluate each stage of the animals' biological life cycle.

There are 23 measurements to assess the welfare of foxes and 22 measurements for mink. The measurements are either resource-based, management-based, or animal-based. Animal-based measures are generally the best method to assess animal welfare but this is not always the case. For example it is difficult to see if an animal is thirsty by observing the animal. However, if the animal always has access to fresh water you can conclude that the animal is

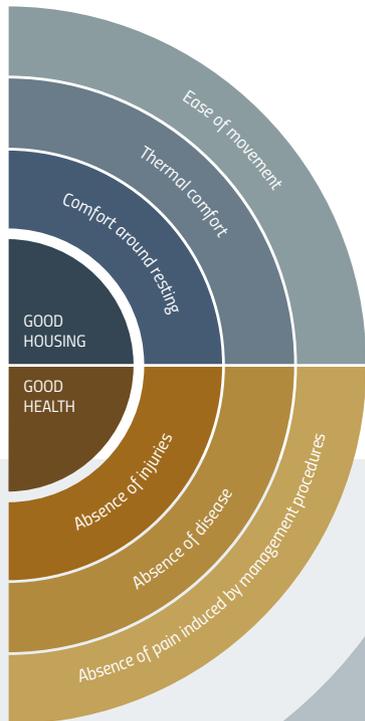
not thirsty. This is why a resource-based measure is preferable to animal-based measure in this case. About half of the measurements in the protocols for mink and fox are animal-based.

All measurements are carried out on a representative farm sample of 80 fox cages and 120 mink cages in order to gain a general representative view of the individual farm. The data from the farm assessment are then processed and stored by software developed by the French National Institute of Agronomic Research (INRA). The result is an easy-to-understand scorecard which places the individual farm in one of four categories: Best Current Practice, Good Current Practice, Acceptable Current Practice or Unacceptable Current Practice. The scorecard will point out any areas of weak animal welfare on the farm, and the fur farmer can use this information as a tool to improve animal welfare.



# Transparency for the public

On an annual basis, Fur Europe publishes reports with relevant data from the assessments. These reports provide the general public with a reliable insight into the welfare standards on European fur farms.



## Objectives of WelFur

- WelFur is being implemented on all European fur farms associated with Fur Europe from 2017 and onwards.
- It is the objective that the WelFur assessments are undertaken by third-parties. They can be national authorities, veterinarians or other external assessors.
- Fur Europe suggests that WelFur serves as scientific reference for regulation and control of European fur farms, and that the programme serves as support to the European Commission's work on the development of a pan-European animal welfare framework law.
- The WelFur protocols will be renewed every five years based on a revision of the current protocols, recommendations of external reviewers and new scientific research.
- It is the aim to increase the number of animal-based measures in the future.

## Ethics

It is the European fur sector's ethical view that humans are allowed to use animals for food, fashion, entertainment, recreational and medical purposes provided that virtues respecting the animals are present. The vast amount of scientific research underlying the WelFur protocols proves that it is possible to house fur farmed species in ways which secure the animals' welfare and a positive experience of their own life. To this end fur farming can – provided the farms are managed well – be to the benefit of both humans and animals. The alternative is no animal lives lived, and no human benefits.

The animals themselves have no appreciation of whether they become food or fashion. A large majority of the European population find the welfare of the animals more important than the ultimate end-use.



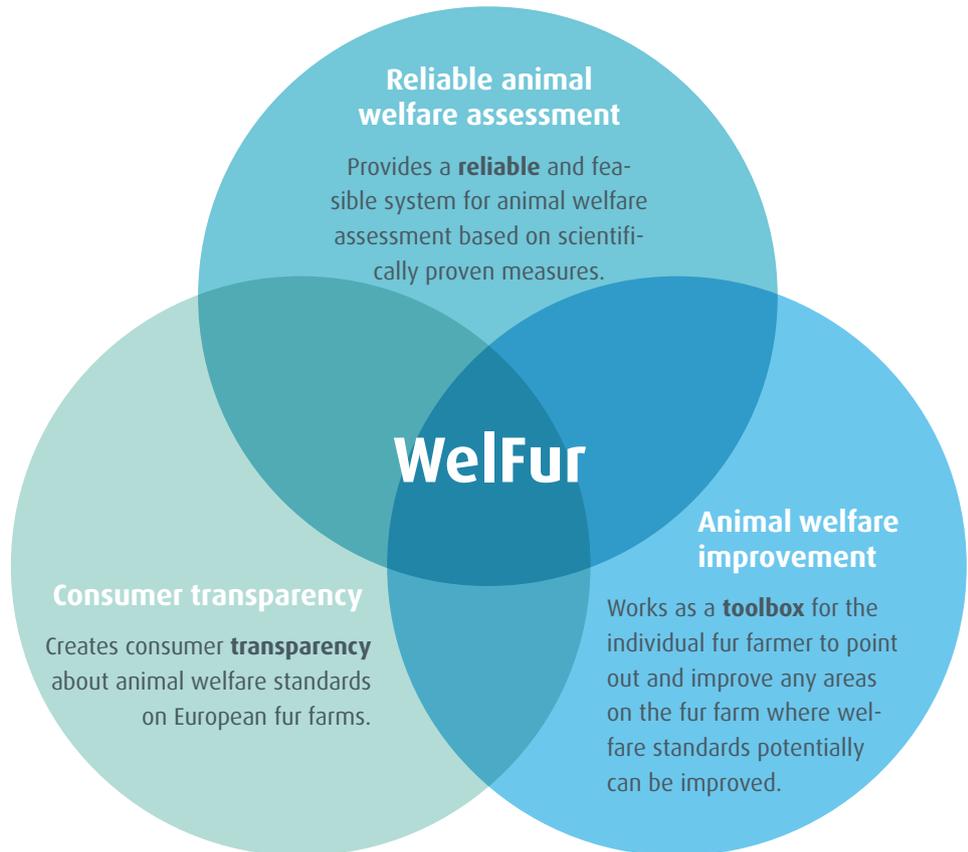
Animal welfare continues to receive more and more attention from the media, NGOs, consumers and politicians. In order to meet society's expectations, animal industries must meet public concerns openly, demonstrate transparency, and have a continued focus on improving animal welfare conditions.

With that in mind, Fur Europe initiated the WelFur programme in 2009, and the finalised protocols were printed in 2013 and 2014. WelFur is a farm level animal welfare certification programme. The programme is based on the methodology of the European Commission's Welfare Quality® project, which is widely recognised as one of the world's most comprehensive animal welfare assessment systems.



We commented on scientific reviews that were conducted into potential welfare issues and potential welfare indicators. These were all detailed, scholarly, involved hundreds of person-hours of work, and were of publishable quality. Their analyses of the key issues, and of the validity, reliability and practicality of the various potential welfare indicators available, were very thoughtful and robust. The relative merits of animal based indicators versus resource-based measures were well appreciated (animal-based measures being favoured wherever possible, a decision we support). Overall, these reviews provided a firm scientific foundation for all subsequent decisions.

From the external scientific review of the finalised WelFur protocols.



# Science-based animal welfare

Animal welfare can be a difficult concept to pin down, and most people have their own personal views. Despite this, there is general agreement within the scientific community about what represents good animal welfare. This consensus is reflected in the four welfare principles established in the European Commission's Welfare Quality® project: Good Housing, Good Feeding, Good Health and Appropriate Behaviour.

Within the principles of Good Housing, Good Feeding, Good Health and Appropriate Behaviour, the Welfare Quality® project defined 12 specific animal welfare criteria. Below the 12 criteria are a number of welfare measurements which are species-specific and must consider the biology of the animal species.



The specific welfare measurements for mink and fox have been chosen by the scientists behind their project for their scientific validity, reliability and feasibility. Representing a consortium of 7 European universities and institutions\*, the scientists did an in-depth review of all existing animal welfare research on fur animals before they identified the welfare indicators and measurements that eventually became the WelFur protocols.

During the development of WelFur, several hundred measures were considered, and upon the completion of the WelFur protocols the scientists will produce a transparency paper explaining in detail the reason for the final measurements.

Throughout the development of WelFur, external scientific reviewers have conserved the quality of the scientific work and the alignment with the original Welfare Quality® project. The scoring of the welfare measurements have been accomplished with the support of INRA (French National Institute of Agronomic Research).

## Good Feeding

- by providing ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.

## Good Housing

- by providing an appropriate environment with thermal comfort, a comfortable resting area, and enough space for the animals to move around freely.

## Good Health

- by keeping animals free from pain, injuries, disease and maintain high standards of hygiene and care.

## Appropriate Behavior

- by ensuring animals can express species-specific behaviors, and normal, non-harmful, social behaviors. Negative emotions such as fear, distress, frustration, or apathy should be avoided whereas positive emotions such as security or contentment should be promoted.



\* The WelFur protocols were developed by the following universities and institutions:

- University of Eastern Finland (Department of Biosciences)
- MTT Agrifood Research Finland (Animal Production Research)
- Aarhus University (Department of Animal Health and Bioscience)
- Norwegian University of Life Sciences (Department of Animal and Aquacultural Sciences)
- Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (Department of Animal Environment and Health)
- University of Utrecht (Department of Animals in Science & Society)
- French National Institute of Agronomic Research



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