

Unit 2

Signs of Health and Ill Health in Farm Animals

Factsheet

What is the role of the farmer in the health management of farm livestock?

The stockperson has a legal and moral obligation to look after the health care and welfare needs of the livestock

1. Health Care

The maintenance of healthy stock requires sound management decisions and good practical skills. Every farmer wants happy, contented, well fed, stress-free productive livestock.

Two measures that can help maintain the animal's healthy status are:

- Preventative control
- Curative control

Prevention is always better than cure says the old adage. It is better to prevent disease outbreaks rather than deal with the consequences. If prevention fails, then the next challenge for the farmer is efficient diagnosis and treatment.

2. Welfare Care

Animals have stress and some pain as part of their daily lives – this has nothing to do with diseases. Modern farming does impose restrictions on their 'naturalness' and does seek maximum production.

The basic need of the animal is described as a 'freedom'.

1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst - by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.

2. Freedom from Discomfort - by providing an appropriate environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

3. Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease - by prevention, or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

4. Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.

5. Freedom from Fear and Distress - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

What are the signs of Health in farm animals?

Healthy animals like people should look as if they are enjoying life!

Here are points to look out for:

Healthy Animals	Sick Animals
They have close contact although scattered will run towards each other to form a group.	Usually isolated and not running with the flock/herd.
Definite physical activity. They are usually eating, walking, playing, grooming or cuddling. They will always stretch after rising.	Immobile and not interested.
Farm animals tend to be greedy if they are well and always want food.	Ill animals have no/little appetite.
The excretion pattern is the same and the dung consistency matches the feed type. There is never any blood and the urine is a light colour.	Diarrhoea or the absence of dung or urine is a sure sign that there is something wrong.
The bovine coat is usually shiny and has lick marks on it. The sheep's fleece is tight and not matted and it should be springy.	A dull coat in a bovine is a bad sign. If sheep are ill, usually their wool breaks or falls out.
The eyes are clear, bright and alert. Eye sockets should be pinky.	Ill animals have sunken eyes and dull. Eyelids stop blinking. If eye sockets are pale/white, this usually means anaemia.
There are no abnormal discharges from the body.	Ill animals can have discharges from eyes, mouth, nose, navel, anus, vagina, teats, ears or penis.
Healthy animals walk well and in a straight line.	Ill animals can walk stiffly, wobble or go round in a circle. Creaking and swollen joints are signs of ill health.
The metabolic traits (pulse rate, breathing and heartbeat) are normal.	The metabolic traits are higher, lower than normal or are erratic.

The importance of taking temperature

The temperature of a farm animal can be used to diagnose ill health according to a pathogen.

Normal Temperatures of Farm Animals

Animal	Temperature Degrees Centigrade	Respiration rate Per minute	Pulse rate Per minute
Cattle	38.7	12-20	45-50
Sheep	39.4	12-30	70-90
Pigs	39.2	10-18	70-80
Horse	37.5	8-12	36-42

Note.

All temperatures can vary slightly within species depending on the weather conditions. It will only change by 0.1 - 0.3 degrees.

Young calves, lambs, piglets and foals tend to have higher temperatures and pulse rates.