BROILER CHICKEN WELFARE CERTIFICATION AT FARM LEVEL IN BRAZIL

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Broiler chicken world population is about 21 billion animals. In Brazil, 5.6 billion broiler chickens were slaughtered in 2013, and domestic market consumes 69% of internal production. The intensification of farm animal welfare debate has led to an increasing number of welfare certification schemes worldwide. However, there is some concern about the extent of these schemes in delivering welfare. In this study, we aimed to identify certification schemes for broiler chicken welfare at farm level as well the number of certified farms in Brazil, and to investigate the extent of nutritional, comfort, sanitary and behavioral welfare indicators within the schemes. Requirements of each scheme were analyzed according to its content and, if pertinent, they were classified in one or more welfare indicators. Two relevant schemes were identified, GLOBALG.A.P.® and Certified Humane®, both in Southern Brazil. GLOBALG.A.P.® is a demand from European importers. A total of 860 broiler chicken farms were certified by GLOBALG.A.P.® and 26 by Certified Humane®, corresponding to 1.9% broiler chicken farms of Southern Brazil. Comfort and sanitary indicators were in greater number in both schemes. On GLOBALG.A.P.® 12.9% of requirements were classified as nutritional, 45.8% as comfort, 44.9% as sanitary and 16.3% as behavioral indicators. Using Certified Humane®, the percentages for the same indicators were 16.6%, 55.2%, 33.3% and 14.6%, respectively. The percentages on each scheme surpassed 100.0% because some requirements were classified in more than one welfare indicator. GLOBALG.A.P.® and Certified Humane® protocols included important items of broiler chicken welfare to benefit animals on certified farms, but with significant possibilities for improvement. Requirements classified as behavioral indicators were commonly related to the resolution of low levels of animal welfare. In both schemes, there is low incentive to use breeds with reduced welfare problems. Animal-based indicators are poorly used and patterns are not established for most of them. It is desirable that certification schemes be critically analyzed on a regular basis regarding their content to meet new demands and to include updates from scientific research to further improve animal welfare. According to this study, the percentage of broiler chicken population on certified farms in Brazil is very low; this may be a consequence of low consumer information about animal production. To increase the number of farms on welfare certification schemes in this country it seems relevant to increase transparency on animal production process and to improve consumer education on the welfare of farmed animals.