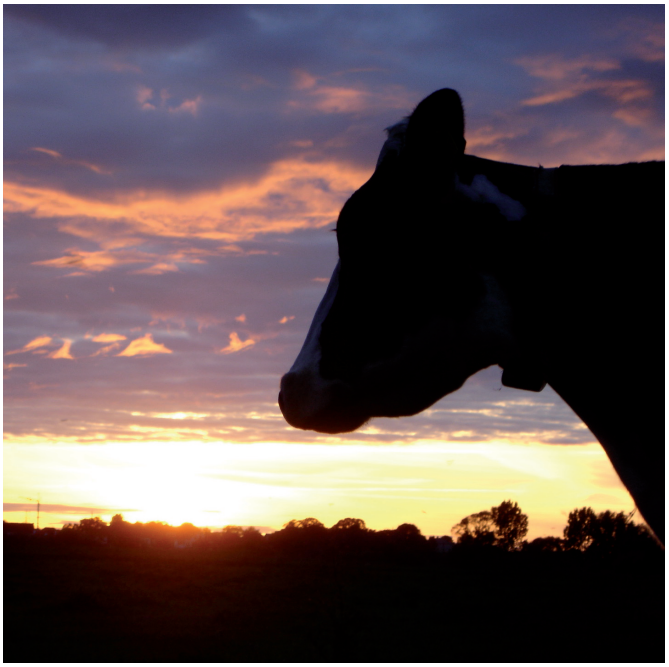
Minimising medicine use in organic dairy herds through animal health and welfare planning (ANIPLAN)

ANIPLAN



Planning for better animal health and welfare in dairy herds

It is a main goal for organic livestock farming that animals should always have excellent health and welfare. However, there are indications that this is not always guaranteed even though organic standards are being followed. The solution could be that the farmers should make animal health and welfare plans for their herds.

High levels of animal health and welfare in organic farming shall be ensured through proactive and appropriate management of breeding, feeding, housing and species-specific husbandry. A goal in organic livestock farming is to minimise the use of veterinary medicines to improve food quality and protect the environment, and to do this by improving livestock living conditions rather than using alternative medical treatments. But principles and regulations of organic farming have been shown not always to be well implemented in organic herds. This project has the objective of minimising medicine use in organic dairy herds through active and well-planned animal health and welfare promotion and disease prevention.

Detailed objectives are to:

- Develop animal health and welfare planning principles for organic dairy farms under diverse conditions based on an evaluation of current experiences.
- Carry out animal health and welfare assessments in different types of dairy herds across Europe. This will result in an overview of the herds and allow for the organic situation (e.g. pasture systems, longer cow/calf contact). For calves a special system will be developed.
- Develop guidelines for communication about animal health and welfare promotion in different settings.

Knowledge analysis

The project is primarily based on collaboration between research institutions with regard to evaluating, analysing and testing existing knowledge and experiences. This knowledge comes from current research activities and animal health and welfare assessment through animal-based parameters as well as advisory systems and farmer groups across borders and into the diverse conditions in many different European regions.

In the UK, health planning is compulsory for organic certification, but at the moment very little is known of how health and welfare plans are developed and how they are implemented at farm level. Therefore a survey on the use of health plans in the UK will be undertaken. This work will form the basis for an analysis of other existing systems, e.g. the recently introduced animal health plan system in Norway and voluntary systems in Switzerland, the Netherlands and Germany.

Another part of the project will work with adaptation of existing animal-based health and welfare parameters. A special welfare plan for calves will be developed and evaluated.

On-farm assessments and case studies
Animal health and welfare will be assessed on 6–40 farms per participating country. Results from these assessments will, among other things, be used for the evaluation of health and welfare planning
systems.

Epidemiological analyses based on data, observations and recordings from a number of case study herds (6–40 in each partaking country) will be carried out. These case study farms all work towards a high level of animal health and welfare and minimisation of medicine use.

How to communicate
Existing advisory systems, farmer groups and other activities to promote animal welfare will be evaluated. An identification of the education needs of farmers, vets and advisors will be included as a part of this work. So will also the development of communication principles in animal health promotion work in the advisory dialogue and in farmer groups.

Farmer groups following the so-called Danish Stable School principle for minimisation of medicine use will be implemented and analysed.

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Work packages
In the project the following work packages will be conducted:

WP1 Coordination and knowledge transfer
WP2 Development of principles for animal health and welfare planning in organic dairy farms
WP3 Development and testing of animal-based parameters for evaluation of animal health and welfare
WP4 Communication about animal health and welfare and disease prevention in advisory systems and farmer groups
WP5 Analysing the effect of minimising the use of medicine trough animal health promotion

Further information
You will find further information at the project website http://www.aniplan.coreportal.org

The project is initiated as a result of the cooperation in CORE Organic. In this EU supported ERA Network, 11 European research funding organisations have launched a joint call, which intends to step up cooperation between national research activities in organic food and farming. Further information on CORE Organic can be obtained at www.coreorganic.org.

By subscribing to the CORE Organic news you can follow the progress in the project. Subscription is possible via www.coreorganic.org.