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Databases in Denmark: opportunities and constraints for welfare assessments

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The Danish Food and Veterinary Administration is responsible for many databases of which several are related to animals. The objective of the present project was to establish database protocols for all databases that might include variables that could be used for animal welfare assessment in cattle and pig herds and to assess, which variables are most suitable for future use. A total of 13 databases were identified as including information of potential relevance for animal welfare. For each database, a responsible person was asked to provide a full database protocol. This included information on: purpose, data accessibility, primary data recording and exact definition of the variables. Hereafter, welfare experts were asked to classify the variables according to relevance and validity. The relevance was judged according to how close a variable could be associated with welfare and the validity was judged according to sensitivity and specificity of the recordings describing the true occurrence. Finally, a summary evaluation was performed also including the actual occurrence of the indicators in the animal population as well as previous assessments and information from literature. Six databases were identified to contain useful information. The most important variables included: animal movements, duration of life, mortality, several meat inspection data related to chronic conditions, medicine consumption and infringement of welfare regulations. However, there are several constraints on the variables which should be included when interpreting the information, in particular to aspects other than health issues. Further, it will be beneficial to add information from databases owned by private organisations and information on e.g. resource related animal welfare indicators.