

Animal Welfare- Compliance Requirements for Farmers

Animal welfare is an important consideration for any livestock farmer. It refers to the duty of care owners and keepers have to their animals and actions they must take to meet their needs and ensure well-being and humane treatment. It encompasses the physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of an animal's life, considering their quality of life and the avoidance of unnecessary suffering.

This article outlines the different compliance and legislation requirements related to on and off-farm animal welfare for farmers in England. Here we cover the monitoring, enforcement and penalty regime for these requirements, as well as where to look for grants and schemes to improve animal welfare.

High standards of animal welfare can lead to improved production, efficiency and quality of products, compared to those raised in stressful, lower-welfare conditions. It can also help to prevent the spread of disease and improve the sustainability of the overall farming business through healthier livestock. By maintaining high animal welfare standards it can also improve the public perception of the farming sector.

As producers, we have an ethical responsibility to look after our animals, this includes complying with legislation that protects all farmed animals. You are responsible for the welfare of any animals that you own or keep.

Compliance requirements

If you are a farmer or land manager and claimed rural payments between 2005 and 2023, you had to follow a set of rules called cross compliance. This included standards of Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAECs) and Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs). Relevant GAECs and SMRs regarding animal welfare included SMR 11: Welfare of calves, SMR 12: Welfare of pigs and SMR 13: Welfare of animals.

While cross compliance ended in 2023, [farmers still have to comply with regulatory standards](#) on the environment, animal and plant health, and animal welfare. These regulatory standards sit under domestic (UK and England) legislation and regulation, as well as some retained European legislation.

The [Animal Welfare Act 2006](#) is the principal law relating to animal welfare, and protects all vertebrate animals. Under the act, owners and keepers have a duty of care to their animals and must make sure they meet their needs:

- for a suitable environment and place to live
- for a suitable diet
- to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- to be housed with, or apart from, other animals (if applicable)
- to be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease

The act makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal and contains a duty of care to animals. Anyone responsible for an animal must take reasonable steps to make sure the animal's welfare needs are met.

Codes of Practice

Codes of practice are available for a variety of livestock types to provide guidance on how to comply with the relevant legislation. They are intended to help those who care for farm animals to practise good standards of stockmanship to safeguard animal welfare. Farmers, and any staff working with animals, must read, understand and have access to the animal welfare codes of practice for the animals you keep or own. While the welfare codes are not law, if you do not follow them, they can be used as evidence in court to show breaches of legislation.

Table 1 outlines the different livestock types and their associated codes of practice.

Table 1: Code of practice associated with different livestock type

(N.B. Some of the references to legislation in the codes are out of date. You should refer to relevant animal welfare legislation and relevant wider legislation as needed.)

Livestock Type	Relevant codes of practice/recommendations
Laying hens and pullets	Code of practice for the welfare of laying hens and pullets
Meat chickens and meat breeding chickens	Code of practice for the welfare of meat chickens and meat breeding chickens
Ducks	Codes of recommendations for the welfare of livestock - ducks
Turkeys	Codes of recommendations for the welfare of livestock - turkeys
Gamebirds	Code of practice for the welfare of gamebirds reared for sporting purposes
Cattle	Code of recommendations for the welfare of livestock: cattle
Pigs	Code of practice for the welfare of pigs
Sheep	Code of recommendations for the welfare of livestock: sheep
Goats	Code of recommendations for the welfare of livestock: goats
Deer	Codes of recommendations for the welfare of livestock - deer

Additional underlying legislation

There are additional regulations and orders with specific compliance requirements for animal welfare. Table 2 presents these along with an overview of their objectives.

Table 2: An overview of the relevant legislation, regulation or order with specific animal welfare requirements for on-farm animal welfare

Legislation, regulation or order with specific animal welfare requirements	Overview of legislation, regulation or order
The Animal Welfare Act 2006	Principal law relating to animal welfare, protecting all vertebrate animals.
The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007	Regulations under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which sets the minimum welfare standards for all farm animals.
Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007	Sets specific conditions for permitted procedures relating to identification (e.g. ear tagging), control of reproduction (e.g. castration), and other management procedures for different species of livestock.

Off-farm Animal Welfare

As well as on-farm animal welfare requirements, rules also apply during transport, slaughter, and at markets and shows. The underlying legislation, regulation and orders are outlined in Table 3.

When animals are transported, their **transportation** must comply fully with legal requirements aimed at protecting their welfare, including the provision of sufficient space, feed and water. Animals should only be transported when necessary, and journey durations should be minimised. Additional requirements such as transporter authorisations, logging of journeys, and additional requirements for drivers and attendants of animals are also required in certain circumstances. See 3 below and further guidance on [animal welfare during transport here](#).

Requirements around animal health and welfare of animals also apply at **markets and shows**. These requirements include a suitable environment and diet allowing them to exhibit normal behaviour. See Table 2 and further guidance on the [welfare of animals at markets at Livestock at farm shows and markets: welfare regulations here](#).

There are also varying requirements for the welfare of animals at the **time of killing**. Animals slaughtered for consumption are to be killed in approved slaughterhouses or by small scale producers for direct supply of small amounts of meat to consumers or local retail.

To slaughter farm animals on the farm you must:

- only use permitted stunning and killing methods,
- be competent to do so (holding a licence if appropriate), and
- follow the relevant requirements of the legislation so that animals are spared any avoidable, pain, distress or suffering during slaughter.

See Table 3 and further guidance on [animal welfare for slaughterhouses, knacker's yards, small-scale producers and private individuals here](#).

Table 3: An overview of the relevant legislation, regulation or order with specific animal welfare requirements for off-farm animal welfare

Legislation, regulation or order with specific animal welfare requirements	Overview of legislation, regulation or order
Retained Regulation (EC) 1/2005 The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006	Sets rules for the commercial transportation of animals.
Retained Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015	Sets out the detailed protections to all farmed animals in England that are killed on farm, in slaughterhouses and elsewhere.
Welfare of Animals at Markets Order 1990 (WAMO) Welfare of Animals at Markets (Amendment) Order 1993	Sets rules for animal welfare at livestock markets

Animal health and disease

Under the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007, any animals which appear to be ill or injured must be cared for appropriately and without delay. Where they do not respond to such care, then veterinary advice must be obtained as soon as possible.

There are some animal diseases that you are legally obliged to report on called [notifiable diseases](#). These can be both endemic (already found in the UK, such as bovine TB) and exotic (not typical for the UK, such as foot and mouth disease).

Any suspected notifiable disease must be [reported](#) to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) immediately. Failure to report your suspicions is a breach of the law. Where there is any doubt, a veterinary professional should be consulted.

There are also [circumstances when you should report dead birds](#). Updates on the latest bird flu (avian influenza) situation in England and guidance for bird keepers and the public can also be found on the [GOV.UK avian influenza pages](#).

Monitoring and enforcement

Compliance monitoring and enforcement is undertaken by the APHA and local authorities to ensure requirements are being met. Inspections can be carried out on a risk or random basis to monitor compliance with legislation, as well as when there have been complaints about the welfare of livestock on farms.

The reason for the inspection will dictate the timing of the visit, and how many, and what groups, of animals need to be inspected.

Following the visit, you will receive a letter to confirm the findings of the inspection. Depending on the type and severity of the issue, the APHA may discuss your case with your local authority who are responsible for taking any formal actions such as caution or initiating prosecution.

There are varying penalties for not meeting compliance requirements related to animal welfare. Anyone who does not provide for an animal's welfare needs may:

- Be banned from owning animals
- Be issued with a penalty notice for up to £5,000
- Face an unlimited fine
- Be sent to prison for up to 6 months

As outlined above, welfare codes and recommendations are not law. However, if they are not followed, they can be used as evidence in court if you are prosecuted under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 for causing unnecessary suffering to livestock or poultry.

The Food Standards Agency monitors and enforces animal welfare rules in slaughterhouses and the APHA does this for killing operations carried out elsewhere.

Grants and Schemes

There are a variety of grants and schemes available to help farmers to improve animal welfare. These cover matters such as annual health and welfare reviews, co-funding of equipment and technology items, co-funding of infrastructure projects on farm, and more. Farmers can apply to many of these grants and schemes in 2024. Expanded offerings for additional animal welfare areas such as disease eradication and control are expected later in the year. Subscribe to the [Defra Farming blog](#) and visit [Funding for farmers, growers and land managers](#) for further information on available and upcoming grants and schemes, and how to apply.

Further Information

For further detail on animal welfare compliance requirements, visit the relevant links outlined in this article. In particular, for further information on the specific compliance requirements when you keep livestock or manage land you can read the [Rules for Farmers and Land Managers](#) webpages on GOV.UK. These are grouped by farming activities rather than individual regulations so you can find the ones that are relevant for animal welfare and that apply to you.

You can also contact the Farming Advice Service helpline if you have any further questions about rules you must follow:

FAS technical advice line: 03000 200 301

Email: advice@farmingadvice.org.uk

LiveChat: farmingadvice.org.uk