



## SPCA Certified: NZVA & NZVNA Conference Paper

### Driving positive change in farmed animal welfare through certification

In 2023, there were approximately 30 million sheep, beef and dairy cattle farmed in New Zealand (Stats NZ 2023), and just under 124 million meat chickens processed (Figure.nz 2024). New Zealanders have high expectations that animals under our care are well looked after, and a recent Horizon Poll showed 90% of respondents believe it is [important to protect farmed animal welfare](#) (Animal Policy International 2023).

While improvements in farming systems can and do positively influence animal welfare outcomes, some people view current legal requirements and enforcement of animal welfare standards in New Zealand as insufficient (e.g. shade and shelter provisions and management of painful processes) (Ferrere 2019). This is reflected in the growing number of assurance or certification programmes that offer consumers the ability to choose products from farming systems that have specific standards related to animal welfare, environmental protection, food safety and product traceability.

There are a variety of assurance/certification programmes in New Zealand, which focus on various aspects, including animal welfare. Examples include PigCare<sup>1</sup>, New Zealand Farm Assured (NZFAP and NZFAP Plus)<sup>2</sup>, Synlait's Lead with Pride<sup>3</sup>, Fonterra's Cared for Cows<sup>4</sup>, ZQ certified<sup>5</sup>, Freedom Farms, Global Animal Partnership<sup>6</sup>, and SPCA Certified<sup>7</sup>, amongst others.

SPCA Certified is a voluntary animal welfare certification programme aiming to improve the lives of as many animals as possible. The programme is independent, not linked to primary industry and drives welfare improvements by requiring member farms/businesses to work toward providing a good life for animals. It recognises those farmers and business owners that go above and beyond the minimum legal requirements for animal welfare.

The programme's standards were derived from the Five Domains Model of Animal Welfare (Mellor et al 2020) and consider a range of factors including SPCA position statements, animal welfare science, current legislation, and advice from veterinarians and technical specialists, as well as industry best practice and practical experience of farmed animal professionals. Programme members are independently audited, with regular notified and non-notified visits (at least twice yearly) to assess compliance with the programme's standards to ensure standards are consistently upheld. The focus of the programme is on incremental improvements as key to sustainable, meaningful, and positive animal welfare outcomes. Importantly, the standards improve animal welfare by providing opportunities for positive experiences, such as more complex environments.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nzpork.co.nz/farmers/pigcare-tm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nzfap.com/>,

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.synlait.com/our-milk/#LWP>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fonterra.com/nz/en/sustainability/animal-wellbeing/cared-for-cows.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.discoverzq.com/certified>

<sup>6</sup> <https://globalanimalpartnership.org/certification/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.spcacertified.nz/>



While some standards are initially harder to achieve, working together with farmers and industry means practical on-farm solutions to meet the standards can be developed, as current members have shown. Some of the impacts of the programme include reduced non-compliance, implementation of written animal health and contingency plans, improved shade and shelter requirements and environmental enrichment. The programme also works to develop relationships with the agricultural industry to drive these changes at a greater scale. Consumers have also shown a willingness to pay for food products with specific attributes, including higher animal welfare (Our Land and Water 2021). A survey by Realini et al (2023) showed that animal welfare certification is considered either very important or moderately important by approximately 58% of consumers, whilst the most important factor used to define sustainability for meat production was 'animal welfare', with 'free range' and 'farming methods' within the top six most important factors.

Additional benefits of certification programmes include increased industry transparency and opportunities for industry to show consumers, internal customers, investors, and trade partners their commitment to animal welfare in their business practices. This aspect is becoming increasingly important for the agricultural industry and associated food companies from a global perspective. For example, the Business Benchmark for Farmed Animal Welfare (BBFAW) assesses over 150 global food companies, including Fonterra, Danone, Marks and Spencer, and Unilever, in terms of their corporate practices and performance in relation to farmed animal welfare (BBFAW 2024). This allows investors to analyse and compare companies on animal welfare performance and make investment decisions based on this information. With approximately 10.5% of New Zealand's gross domestic product accounted for by the food and fibre sector (Ministry for Primary Industries 2023), ensuring New Zealand's high animal welfare credentials is of utmost importance.

Unfortunately, external pressures can affect the growth of animal welfare certification programmes. Amongst others, this includes inconsistency in willingness to pay for high animal welfare at the food retail level, external cost pressures limiting infrastructure improvements on farm and limited support and engagement from the retail food sector.

Animal welfare certification programmes allow us to look at new ways of viewing on-farm challenges and to discuss how we can overcome these challenges to provide farmed animals with a good life. Science-based certification programmes, such as SPCA Certified, play an active role alongside robust government standards and proactive industry bodies in advancing animal welfare standards in New Zealand.

## References

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