

# **Farmer opinion on the process of health and welfare planning in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Norway and Switzerland**

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## **Background**

This report serves as a deliverable from the ANIPLAN project, with the original title 'Evaluation report on state of the art regarding animal health and welfare planning in the participating countries' (Deliverable 5.1). We chose to focus on the farmers' perspective in each country, and ask the farmers who had participated in our project how they perceived the process of animal health and welfare planning. We did that using a questionnaire which each participant used in an interview with the farmer, asking some specific questions with the aim to evaluate how the farmers had experienced the ANIPLAN approach. We found that this focus was important as a supplement to other outcomes from the project, such as reduction of medicines (Ivemeyer et al., 2011) and improvement of animal based parameters (Gratzler et al., 2011). Furthermore potential scenarios for implementation of this concept into practice can be developed from the farmers responses.

## **Method**

This questionnaire (Annex 1) was developed during the Workshop in Reichenau 2009 based on a presentation by Rahel Kilchsberger (FIBL Switzerland) on "Qualitative research methods" and a discussion on the topic as well as on an existing questionnaire used by the German partners during a previous project on the implementation of health and welfare plans (March et al., 2007). The questionnaire was conducted by the national project partners in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland during the final visit as semi-qualitative interviews where the answers in most cases were written down during the conversation, taped in Denmark and given as written feed-back in Norway.

The small sample size of questionnaires in most of the countries (Norway (2), the Netherlands (10), Switzerland (11) and Denmark (12)) needs to be taken into account, when discussing the results. Furthermore the various situations and experiences across countries and the different people performing the interviews have to be considered, however, the questionnaire was jointly developed and discussed during the Workshop in Reichenau.

## **Results**

### **1. Perception of farmers regarding content and aim of the project**

In the opening question, the farmers were asked to give their impression on the content of ANIPLAN, by answering the question: "What was this project about?" The selected quotes illustrate that a number of farmers perceive that the project was about on-farm assessment to stimulate improvement:

- "look what is good and bad on farm (and should be improved)" (NL)
- "gives good information about cows and stable" (NL)
- "external person opening your eyes" (NL)
- "stimulating farmers to improve health and welfare" (NL)
- "to find practical parameters for assessing animal welfare in dairy production" (NO)
- "to find the bigger picture of the health and welfare status on my farm" (DK)
- "to help us understand our own influence on the cows and how we can be better animal caretakers" (DK)

## 2. Evaluation of the general concept and the inclusion of animal based parameters

Furthermore farmers were asked to give their opinion on the general concept, defined as the continuous process of assessment, feedback, planning and reevaluation. Especially in Austria (1.4), Germany (1.5), Switzerland (1.7) and Denmark (1.8) the concept seemed to be well received by farmers. The importance of the inclusion of animal based parameters as part of the process was scored similarly high (Table 1).

**Table 1 Ranking of importance of animal based parameters and general acceptance of the approach (1=very to 5= not at all) across countries (AT= Austria, CH=Switzerland, DE= Germany, DK=Denmark, NL= Netherlands, NO=Norway) as mean (min- max)**

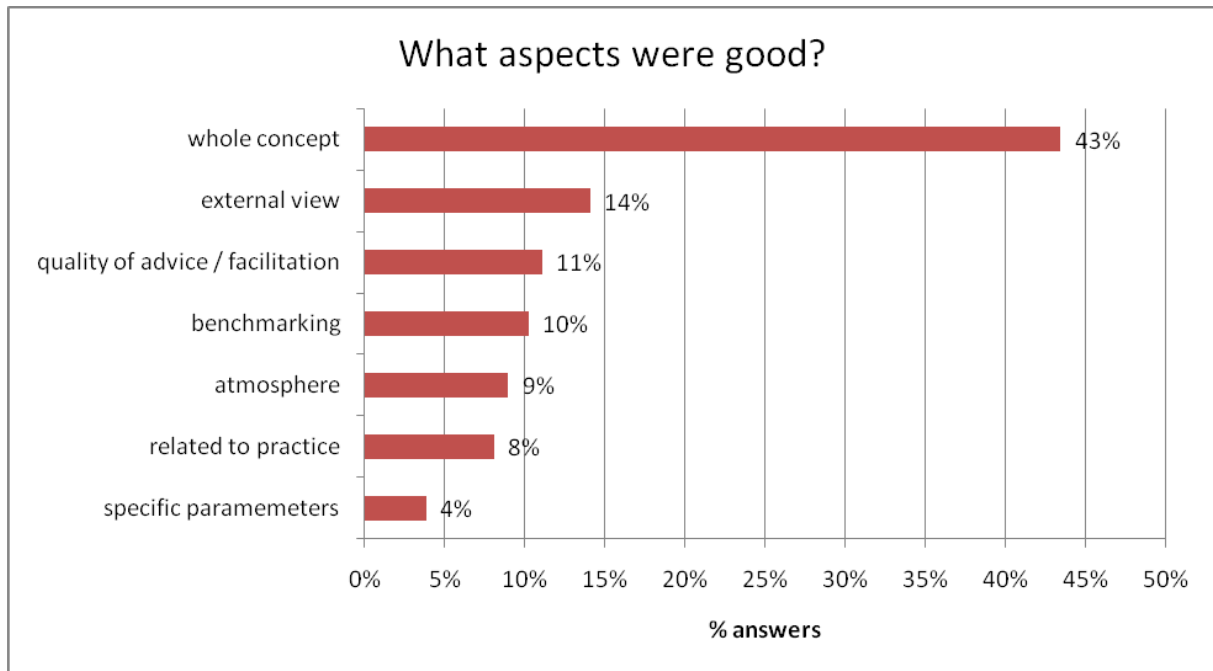
	AT (n=38)	CH (n=11)	DE (n=28)	DK (n=12)	NL (n=10)	NO (n=2)
How important are animal based parameters in your animal health and welfare planning strategy?	1,4 (1 - 3)	1,7 (1 - 3)	1,5 (1 - 3)	1,6 (1 - 3)	2 (2 - 2)	3 (2 - 4)
	AT (n= 39)	CH (n=11)	DE (n=28)	DK (n=12)	NL (n = 3)	NO (n=2)
Did you like the concept of the project?	1,4 (1 - 2)	1,7 (1 - 3)	1,5 (1 - 2)	1,8 (1 - 3)	2 (2 - 2)	2,5 (2 - 3)

## 3. „Good“ and „not so good“ aspects of the project

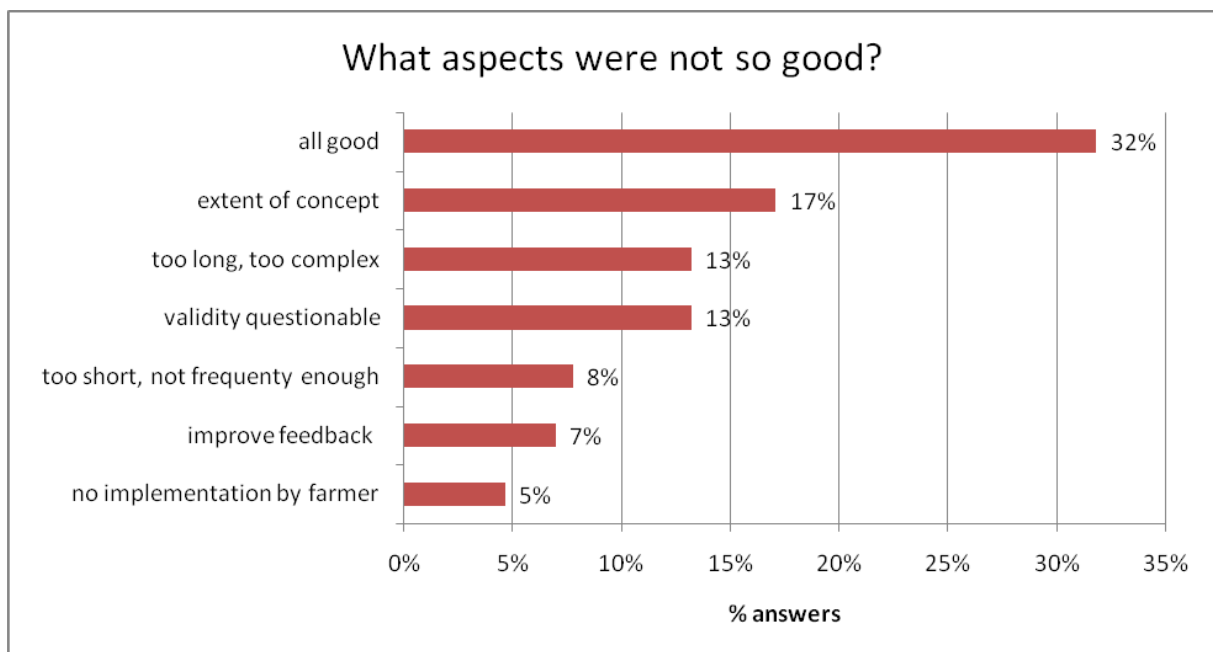
Using open questions, farmers were asked to list aspects of the project, which were specifically “good” or “not so good”. 235 terms or answers in total were given by 99 farmers for ‘good’ and 101 farmers gave 121 answers for ‘not so good’. The first author grouped these answers into categories, which were given the headlines as indicated in Figure 1 and 2, respectively. The categories clearly are very different in nature, some directed towards the concept of the project and some towards the approach (e.g. using farmer groups). The most common (43% of all answers) “good” aspect was the aspect of the “whole concept”, meaning the process of assessment, identification of challenges, discussion of solutions and reevaluation as a measure of effectiveness. To a lower but similar degrees quality of advice (11%), benefits of an external person(14%), relatedness to practice (8%), a good atmosphere (9%) and the possibility to compare the own situation with the data of similar farms as “benchmarking” (10%) was mentioned by farmers.

The following quotes are illustrating the answers in more detail, and show the broad range of thoughts which the farmers relate to this question:

- “other people have similar problems, that we can tackle together” (CH)
- “a link between research and practice“ (CH)
- “no “translation” of the advice given necessary” (CH)
- “arguments are based on the animal instead of the usual economic argumentation – this is blatantly different to the „normal“ agricultural advisory situation” (CH)
- “challenges are documented, it is possible for us to recognise weaknesses of the farm” (AT)
- “project person is a carrier of information, coach, moderator” (D)
- “to learn more about the behaviour of our cows. We look at our cows in a different way now” (DK)



**Figure 1: Distribution of answers in categories regarding the question: “What aspects were good?” 99 farmers, 235 answers (AT, CH, DE, DK, NL, NO included)**



**Figure 2: Distribution of answers in categories regarding the question: “What aspects were not so good?” 101 farmers, 129 answers (AT, CH, DE, DK, NL, NO included)**

Regarding the question “which aspects were not so good?” a third (32%) of farmers did state, that there was nothing which they would call ‘not good’. Again, a number of answers reflected particular situations in some countries, e.g. a category like ‘quality of advice’, which could both reflect that the involved advisors or facilitators had not lived up to some expectations or a level of advice which they normally felt they had access to. 17% of farmers had some suggestions on how to improve the concept of health and welfare planning, such as adding certain issues or changing details of the procedure. The duration and extent of the project was almost to the same degree judged as too long (13%) and by other farmers as “too short” (8%). This might also refer back to the expectations of the farmers, and they might

have been introduced differently in different countries to the project including length (the project lasted one year, in DK two years). Also the topic of validity of parameters was discussed (13%) and the type of feedback of data (7%).

Farmers came with viewpoints about how the process worked for them, such as:

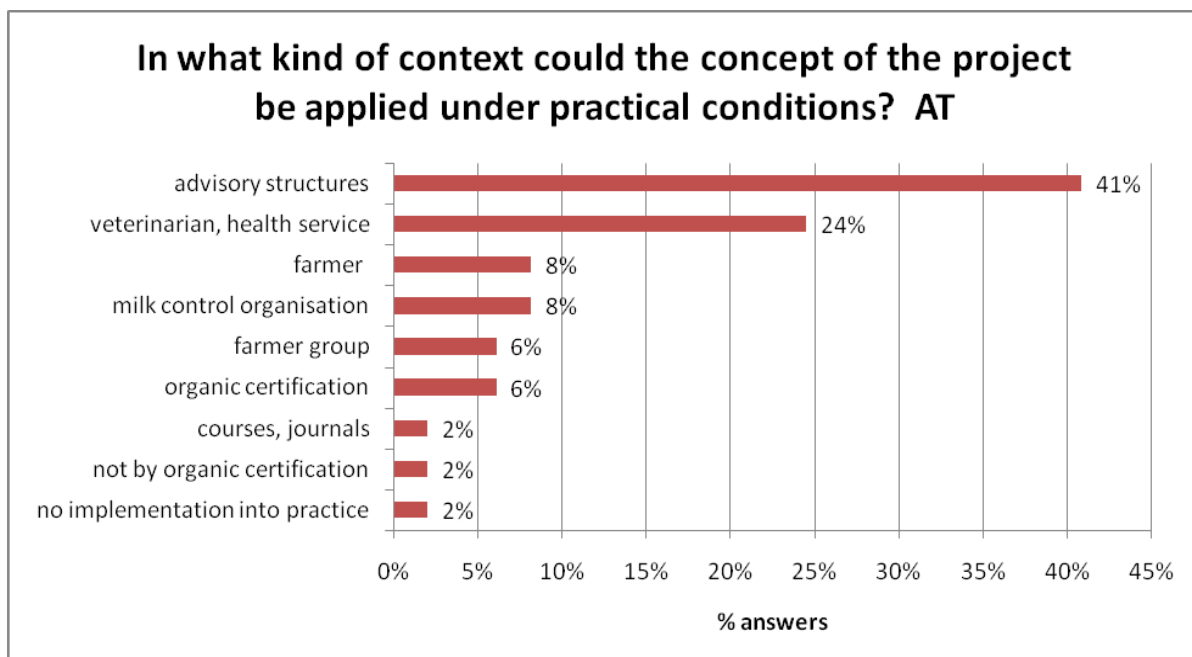
- “unpleasant to be reminded in improvements you cannot do because of economy” (NO)
- “you as advisor try your best (and I do not think, that you could improve something), however, the implementation from my side is missing” (AT)
- „long distances to travel and a lot of time necessary“ (CH)

This underlined the importance of the farmer setting the agenda and owning the problem and hence also the solution. This (‘farmer ownership’) is one of the ANIPLAN principles, but it can be difficult to practice; and even though e.g. fellow farmers in a farmer group come up with suggestions which are too expensive for the farmer who asks for advice, it may still be unpleasant to have the suggestions. Also practical issues like time to go to farmer meetings are included:

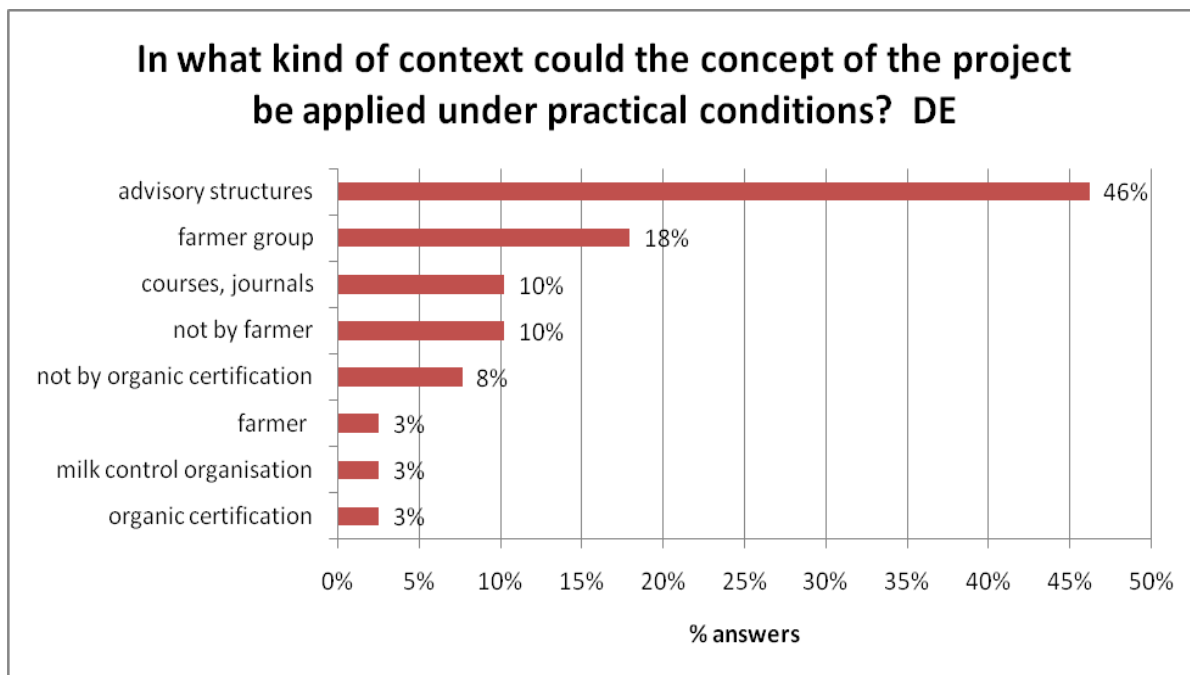
#### 4. Options to integrate concept into existing national structures

Finally farmers were asked to give some potential options to integrate the concept into existing (national) structures. This is illustrated for Austria (Figure 3) and Germany (Figure 4) separately, as a high number of farmers did answer this question in those countries, whereas Figure 5 illustrates responses across all countries. Results are of course completely dependent on the national structures and organizations which are well-known to the farmers.

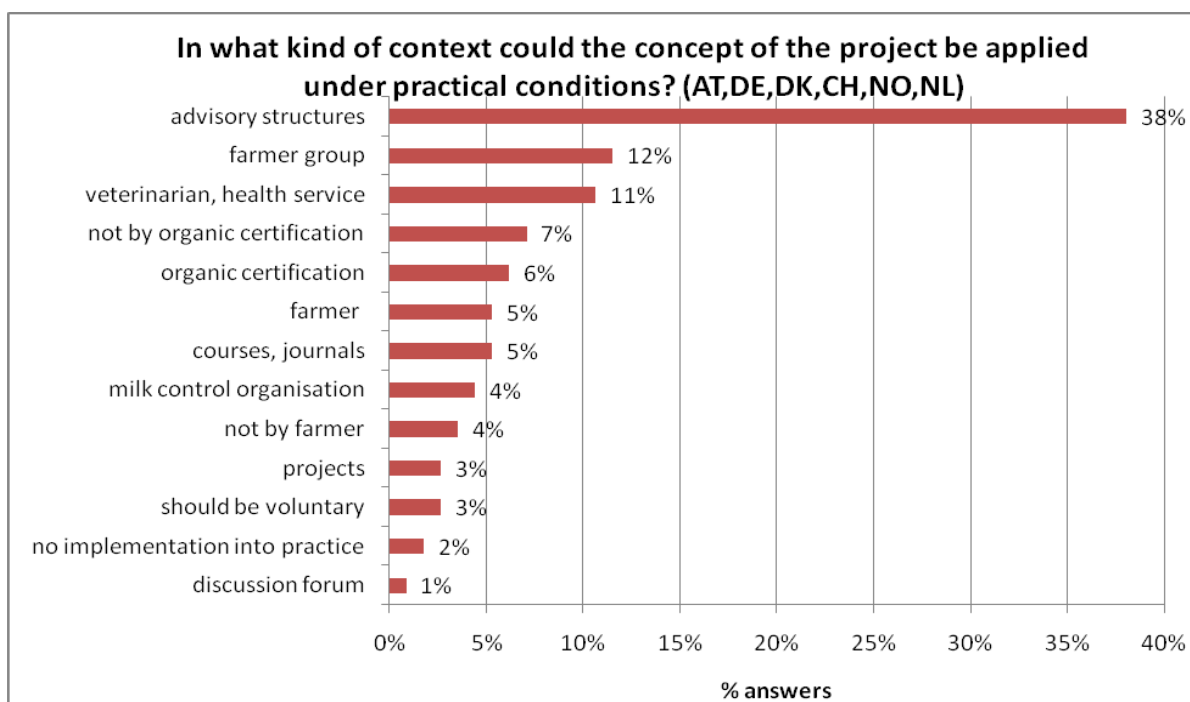
Nevertheless, existing advisory bodies are ranked as the first option across countries. Austrian farmers rank veterinarians and the health service as the second most important option, which reflects that they can see possibilities to integrate this approach with the existing structures. This is also reflected in Figure 5, where this suggestion is almost only made by Austrian farmers. However, also Norway has a well organized veterinary health service which could be linked to health and welfare planning. In contrast to this, German farmers mention farmer groups as the second most relevant option.



**Figure 3** Distribution of answers in categories regarding the question: “In which context could the concept of the project be applied under practical conditions?” in Austria (n= 32 farmers, 49 answers)



**Figure 4** Distribution of answers in categories regarding the question: **In which context could the concept of the project be applied under practical conditions?''** in Germany (n=25 farmers, 39 answers)



**Figure 5:** Distribution of answers in categories regarding the question: **In which context could the concept of the project be applied under practical conditions?''** in Austria (AT), Switzerland (CH), Germany (DE), Denmark (DK), the Netherlands (NL) and Norway (NO) (n=74 farmers, 113 answers). Please notice that 57 of the farmers come from Austria and Germany, and altogether 17 farmers come from DK, CH, NO and NL.

Below some quotes give interesting aspects and suggestions regarding the implementation of the ANIPLAN approach into existing structures, especially the last quote meets the impression of the project participants most- a concept based on the individuality of farmers and their farms needs to be implemented not just by one, but by various ways in order to fulfill the specific needs.

- “starting point for a „cow comfort“ label including animal based parameters – important for the future of organic farming“ (CH)
- “by implementation of stable schools try to establish this concept in all countries” (D)
- “don` t use it as a part of certification, the situation there is felt as irksome- please no additional duty for the farmer” (D)
- “the concept of this project should be taken up by advisory bodies” (D)
- “via various adequate concepts, the individually different needs of farmers could be fulfilled optimally”(D)

## 5. Willingness to pay for advise

Furthermore farmers were asked about their willingness to pay for having advice, as well as the amount of money which they would be willing to spend on animal health and welfare promotion services. The answers are listed in Tables 2 and 3 and partly reflect national traditions for service delivery and paying for ‘improving as professional farmers’. In the Netherlands, there is a strong tradition for farmer groups and many farmers have personal experience that they get much out of it, where it is more seen as ‘clubs’ in some countries with less strong traditions, in contrast to ‘having a visit by an expert or advisor’ is seen as something worth paying for. The amount is likewise reflecting traditions and probably price levels in general, in addition to farmer perceptions on farmer groups which they maybe do not have any chance to have experienced themselves, and it cannot be compared across countries. Besides that there is a big difference in herd size between countries.

**Table 2: For which of the above ranked options would you be willing to pay? (Multiple answers allowed)**

	one to one	farmer group, external expert	stable schools	self organized	other
AT (n=38)	76%	55%	16%	0%	13%
CH (n=11)	91%	18%	64%	0%	0%
DE (n=28)	71%	18%	46%	0%	4%
NL (n=10)	40%	100%	70%	50%	0%
NO (n=2)	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%

**Table 3: How much money would you spend on herd health and welfare promotion (€)? (Norway not included, as only two farms)**

	AT		CH		DE		NL	
	per year	per cow	per year	per cow	per year	per cow	per year	per cow
n	28	7	3	8	27		8	
Mean	332	8	860	26	1.143		422	
Median	250	10	740	20	500		413	
Min	0	3	740	4	100		100	
Max	2.000	10	1.100	60	5.000		1.000	

## Discussion

As shown in **Annex 2**, the planning process was carried out in Austria, Germany, Netherlands and Norway during one-to-one meetings and in Switzerland and Denmark the stable school concept was implemented as an option which the farmers could choose. Therefore farmers

had experience with one or two advisory systems in the planning process, namely communication in farmer groups (stable schools) and communication with advisors (so-called one-to-one meetings). Farmers might have taken also experiences from other sources into account. So, when farmers are asked to give their opinion on ‘advisory system’, their answers will of course be based on the level of knowledge about the different options, and their own experience, or lack of experience, with certain types of communication.

The ANIPLAN project was conducted in collaboration with different national projects, and they had slightly different focus, which can be reflected in the way in which the question was answered, and to some extent also asked by partners. Farmers were approached differently in different countries and no question focused on the expectations of the farmer to the project. This question about what the project was about, seen from the farmer point of view, did therefore not reflect whether the project actually met any expectations.

### **Conclusions and final remarks**

Based on this questionnaire survey, it seems reflected in the answers that many farmers felt that they benefitted from participating in this project, in which animal health and welfare promotion was in focus in various ways as part of a research project. Farmers also felt that it would be relevant to take the concept up in the existing national structures of advisory services. Discussions across countries are difficult in many cases, because of the highly different farming and advisory conditions, which even exist within countries. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted by many different persons, who firstly had been primary actors in conducting the whole project and practicing the concept together with the farmers whom they interviewed. In addition to this, we have attempted to present the results in a rather quantitative manner, partly based on a conclusion that a qualitative analysis is clearly not possible based on this material. We have presented a range of opinions on various aspects of how the project was practiced in different countries. In addition to other results from the project, we conclude that our end-users have found many aspects of this concept useful, and we underline the importance of that the farmer should be motivated to do animal health and welfare planning on his or her farm. This can be done by various different ways, which has to be chosen by the individual farmer in order to own the whole process and to actually implement improvement measures.

### Literature

Gratzer et al., 2011. Herd health and welfare in organic dairy farming - A baseline study in seven European countries. (manuscript to be submitted 2011).

Ivemeyer, S., G. Smolders J. Brinkmann, E. Gratzer, B. Hansen, B. I. F. Henriksen, J. Huber, C. Leeb, S. March, C. Mejdell, P. Nicholas, S. Roderick, E. Stöger, M. Vaarst, L. K.

Whistance, C. Winckler M. Walkenhorst, 2011. Effects of health and welfare planning on medicine use, health and production in European organic dairy farms. (manuscript; to be submitted 2011).

March, S., Brinkmann, J., Winckler, C., Goeritz, M., Oppermann, R., Rahmann, G., 2007. Herd health plans and herd health indicators from the point of view of organic milk producers – preliminary results of a pilot study in Germany. 9. Wissenschaftstagung Ökologischer Landbau

**Annex 1: questionnaire which the research team asked to farmers**

**Farm:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ID:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Experiences**

Warm up question: What do you think this project is about? (open question)

Questionnaire:

1) Based on your experiences and what you have heard, which of the following advisory systems would help you in the future to improve animal health and welfare on your farm. Please rank your preferred four systems by numbering 1=most important to 4=less important.:

- A)  "intensive"-coaching (1 advisor : 1 farmer)
- B)  farmer group with external advisor/ expert
- C)  „stable schools“
- D)  self organized farmer group, without external advisor/ expert
- E)  other, like: .....
- F)  no advice at all

2.a) For which of the above ranked options would you be willing to pay?

- A)       B)       C)       D)       E)       F)  no payment at all

2.b) How much money would you spend on herd health and welfare promotion per year?  
..... €..... (per year or per cow and year)

3.a) How important are animal based parameters in your animal health and welfare planning strategy? (animal based parameters mean anything you can observe on the animal or in the health records)

very important      1      2      3      4      5      not important

3.b) Which animal-based parameters are the most relevant for you (max. 5)?

- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....
- 4. ....
- 5. ....

4.a) Did you like the concept of the project? (concept = spiral diagram and all its related components)

very much      1      2      3      4      5      no, not at all

4.b) What aspects were good?

4.c) What aspects were not so good?

5. In what kind of context could the concept of the project be applied under practical conditions?

6. How will/ would you go on with the improvement of herd health and welfare on your farm (after the end of this project)? (open question)



## Annex 2: The way in which the project was carried out in practice in the partner countries

	Austria	Germany	Denmark	Switzerland	Netherlands	UK	Norway
Total no of farms	39	42 (number of farms observed), allocated to either control (n=14) or intervention group (n=28).	15	15	10	19	6 (+3 calves)
Observers (assessment of animals)	4	2	1	2	1	2	1
Number of farms with FFS / 'stable schools'	0	0	6	13	0	9 (4 of which were adapted i.e only one meeting per farm)	0
Number of One-to-One-farms	39	28	9	2	10	10	6 (+ 3 calves)
Total number of facilitators	4	2	1	2	1	1	1
Same people assessing and facilitating?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Way of communication about plan	Additional visit and face to face planning	Additional visit and face to face planning	Feed-back report sent, phone calls to select focus areas, additional visit to formulate the plan	Additional visit (and face-to-face planning OR: Feed back report with invitation to FFS, phone call with farmer before FFS to select focus area)	Direct during visit and additional phone call/email	Plans do exist, so no additional plan made	Directly during visit and additional phone call/ email
Type of feedback	Written report	Written report	Written report	Written report	Written report	Written report	Written report
How were data presented?	Benchmark, suggested intervention levels	Benchmark, suggested intervention levels	Text + Table (kind of benchmark)+ Photos	Benchmarking, overview over one year, welfare: "Austrian system", health: ProQ system	Benchmark, meeting	Benchmark and issues highlighted	Written report with issues highlighted and suggested intervention levels, benchmark
How was the feedback used for planning?	Directly integrated in written plan and in planning	Directly integrated in written plan and in planning	Sent to the farmer, so they knew about it before the phone call, in FFS it was sent to all farmers	Health: before visit, monthly; welfare: with invitation to FFS/one to one: at day of planning visit	Directly integrated in plan	Suggested to farmers that they might want to include issues raised in feedback in FFS	Discussion on the farm and on the phone after farmer had received written report
Type of plan	Goals and measures decided/written by farmer	Goals and measures decided by farmer	Written, in FFS it was the minutes of the meeting, always two selected problem areas	Written minutes (from FFS or one-to -one planning visit)	Oral planning based on written feedback report	Written (existing plan)	Written plan (separate document) signed by both farmer and facilitator (advisor)
Did you leave any parameters out in the feedback?	QBA	QBA, social behaviour	(QBA)	QBA	QBA	All parameters assessed were included	None
Were good aspects included?	Indicated in green	All parameters presented	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, highlighted in report, briefly mentioned in plan
At how many farms were external advisors and/ or vets present and in which form	0	24	0	0	0	0	0
How did you integrate the organic principle framework?	Suggested measures within the organic principles	Suggested measures within the organic principles	By attempting to stimulate and solutions within the organic principles	Suggested measures within the organic principles	Suggested measures within the organic principles	Suggested measures within the organic principles	Mentioned in report, if deviations from organic regulation
ANIPLAN Activities between visits	Phone calls to farmers	Assessment and update of plan after 6 month, Phone calls/emails on 25% of farms	One workshop on 15th Dec 2009 about phasing out antibiotics where all farmers were invited	additionally 2 meetings with all ANIPLAN farmers, additional phone calls partly, depending on goals (long term goals as breeding difficult to evaluate)	Phone calls/emails to farmers	Agenda setting by facilitator and/or PN for discussion group (phone), occasional emails between farmers	Discussion meeting – only two of the farms joined
Evaluation of plan during final visit with the farmer	Yes (measures and goals)	Yes (measures and goals)	At second FFS visit or second individual planning meeting		No real evaluation	No	Yes (measures and goals)
Updated plan during final visit	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Number of farms participating simultaneously in another project	0	0	Most of them probably in project activities around para tuberculosis	15 (pro-Q till May 2010, afterwards Feed no Food)	3 resistance, 4 antibiotic free network, 1 strategic network	Unknown- some farms were demonstration farms and few in lameness project	0
Number of farms participating previously in another project	0	28	All- various projects from interview surveys to previous FFS	15 (pro-Q till May 2010, afterwards Feed no Food)	2 dry cow management, 2 concentrate level	Unknown, probably some in e.g. homeopathic study	Unknown
Selection of farms	Representative sample approached by project team	Representative sample approached by project team	Letter from dairy company; > 40 wanted to participate, 15 were selected more or less randomly (according to region)	Selected from ProQ network, regional reasons, farmers were approached, but only interested farmers participated, not representative for CH	Selected from list of all farms in NL, farmers were asked to participate,	Via organic milk cooperative	Location: More farms in same area, contacted by phone
Time between planning and second assessment	9-12 month	12 months	2-10 month	2-7 month	11 month	SR: 2-10 month, PN: 1-2 month, MN/IR: not known	12 month