

Why observers should train clinical scoring

Sabine Dippel ¹, Armelle Prunier ¹, Christine Leeb ²

¹ INRA, UMR SENAH, Saint-Gilles, France, contact: s.dippel[a]web.de

² BOKU - University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Vienna, Austria



Introduction

Epidemiological studies often involve clinical scoring by several observers. Extensive observer training improves observer agreement. However, this is still not common in international cooperations.

Objective

→ illustrate consequences of suboptimal observer training

Methods

Scoring systems

- body condition: 5-level scale
- injuries: no. of lesions >3 cm
- lameness: 3-level scale
- dirtiness: 3-level scale
- skin alterations: 3-level scale (adapted from Welfare Quality ®)

Training & testing

- training: 2 days, 2 farms, thereafter farm visits
- testing: ≤ 50 gestating (indoor/outdoor) and lactating sows (outdoor), 2 organic farms, 9 observers, 1 day

Analysis

- collapse parameters into binary variables
- Prevalence Adjusted Bias Adjusted Kappas (PABAK)

Results

- parameter with best agreement: “too thin”
- good agreement but low prevalence: lameness, obesity (prevalence: 3 and 8 %)
- explanation for poor agreement for skin problems and dirtiness: misunderstandings regarding parameter definition (e.g. inclusion of mud soiling).



Fig. 1: Pairwise PABAK for eight tested parameters.

Conclusions

- 1) Intensive observer training before data collection is important to ensure observer agreement
- 2) Inter-observer agreement tests before and after data collection are strongly recommended.

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