



## **Code of Conduct – standard justification**

**PL.1.d** - The Red Tractor code of conduct as a minimum must be completed and signed by each persons interacting with animals

### **Justification**

The behaviour, attitudes and actions of people working with livestock have a direct impact on animal welfare outcomes. Whilst appropriate facilities, health planning and management systems are essential components of good stockmanship, the day-to-day treatment of animals depends on the individuals responsible for their care. Poor handling or inappropriate behaviour can cause animal distress or suffering, but can also undermine public confidence in standards of livestock production and damage the reputation of the wider industry. Individual stockmanship therefore has consequences beyond the animals and farm concerned.

Research has consistently demonstrated that the quality of human-animal interactions can significantly influence animal welfare, behaviour and productivity. Positive handling is associated with reduced fear responses, lower stress levels and improved ease of management, whilst poor handling practices can result in injury, distress, behavioural problems and compromised welfare. The competence, attitude and behaviour of stockpeople are therefore widely recognised as key determinants of animal welfare outcomes, and research indicates that attitudes and behaviour can be improved through appropriate training.

A signed Code of Conduct provides a clear and consistent statement of the standards of behaviour expected from anyone working with livestock on a Red Tractor dairy farm. It reinforces individual responsibility for animal care, promotes a culture of accountability and helps ensure that welfare expectations are understood by employees, family members, relief milkers and self-employed personnel. This is particularly important because poor practice can become normalised if inappropriate behaviour is repeated, tolerated or observed without challenge. The Code also requires individuals to report suspected mistreatment, neglect or poor handling, helping to establish a culture in which unacceptable treatment is recognised, challenged and addressed. These expectations support existing legal responsibilities under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, as applicable and the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations applicable in the relevant UK nation to safeguard animal welfare and prevent unnecessary suffering. The Red Tractor template specifically requires signatories to acknowledge these responsibilities and commit to reporting incidents of mistreatment where observed.



Recent publicly documented instances of poor stockmanship have demonstrated how the behaviour of individuals can affect confidence in animal welfare standards across the wider livestock industry. Requiring all individuals who interact with livestock a member's farm to sign a Code of Conduct provides documented evidence that animal welfare expectations have been communicated and understood. It establishes a consistent baseline across all assured farms and demonstrates a commitment to fostering a positive welfare culture throughout the business. It also reinforces to everyone that all those working with livestock have a role in protecting both animal welfare and the confidence placed in the industry by customers and the wider public.

This requirement is intentionally straightforward and proportionate. The Code of Conduct is not designed to replace training, competence requirements or legal obligations. Instead, it complements them by ensuring that every individual involved in animal care formally acknowledges their responsibilities towards livestock welfare and their obligation to act when welfare concerns arise. The industry is continuing to develop its approach to animal handling training and the assessment of existing training provision. The Code therefore provides an immediate baseline while this wider work develops, and a foundation on which more formal requirements for animal handling knowledge, practical skills and competence can be built. By requiring individuals to personally sign and acknowledge these commitments, the requirement strengthens accountability for animal welfare standards and helps ensure there is a clear record that welfare expectations have been communicated, understood and accepted. Through incorporating these expectations within everyday farm management, the requirement supports Red Tractor's objective of promoting high standards of animal welfare, responsible stockmanship and public confidence in livestock production.

## **References**

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