RSG ASSESSMENTS
CLASSIFICATION OF FINDINGS

CLASSIFICATION OF SPECIFIC ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE FINDINGS

In addition to the general guidance on interpretation of assessment findings, Nestlé has determined the following classification of certain specific animal health welfare findings, based on its global Commitment on Farm Animal Welfare. These classifications must be applied irrespective of whether the finding concerned may be considered normal practice in the country or region where the assessment is being performed.

FOR CATTLE

**Tail docking** – this means the removal of one or more tail vertebrae. It is usually done at about 18 months of age, but may be done when younger. Tail docking is typically done with a rubber ring, but may be done with shears. This must be recorded as **CRITICAL** when performed as a routine management procedure.

*Exception* – it should not be recorded as a non-conformance if done occasionally as a remedial procedure under anaesthesia by a veterinary surgeon (for example to remove a broken or infected tail). In such cases post-operative analgesia (pain relief) should also be given.

*Note* – Older or “bought-in” docked cows may be seen on farms where docking is not performed. The presence of these animals should not be recorded as a non-conformance if there is evidence that docking is no longer practiced at the farm.

**Dehorning** – this means the removal of horns, as opposed to horn buds. This is typically done at around six months old or older. This must be recorded as **CRITICAL** when it is a routine practice on the farm.

*Exception* – it should not be recorded as a non-conformance if done occasionally to individual animals as a remedial procedure under anaesthesia by a veterinary surgeon (for example to remove ingrowing horns). In such cases post-operative analgesia (pain relief) should also be given.

**Disbudding** – this is the removal of horn buds, usually done when calves are a few days old. Two methods are commonly seen, caustic and thermal. Both aim to destroy and remove the horn bed, preventing horn growth. Nestlé advocates the use of polled (hornless) genetics where possible. However, Nestlé is not opposed to routine disbudding as a management procedure when suitable polled bloodlines are not available, as long as it is performed with appropriate pain relief during and after the procedure. In the case of thermal disbudding local anaesthetic must be used. When thermal disbudding is performed without local anaesthetic this must be recorded as **CRITICAL**. When either thermal or caustic disbudding is performed calves should be given post-operative analgesia (pain relief). Failure to do so, even if local anaesthesia was used must be recorded as **MAJOR**.

*Note* – caustic disbudding uses a strong alkali, normally potassium hydroxide (KOH) applied as a solution via a crayon or as a paste. The chemical burns the horn bud and often also the surrounding tissue. The caustic material is not painful at the moment of application, but becomes so as the chemical begins to burn the skin.
Problems occur when calves rub the caustic material onto themselves or each other, which may result in incomplete disbudding and the consequent growth of distorted horn remnants or scarring.

Note – thermal disbudding is typically done with a gas-fired cutting iron with which the horn bud is gouged out and simultaneously cauterised. Problems occur when calves struggle against the pain of the hot iron and the horn bed is incompletely removed. There is strong evidence that calves suffer a significant growth check when disbudding is performed without the use of post-operative analgesia.

Castration – unless they are to be reared as entire bulls, male calves are typically castrated up to around six-months of age. This must be performed with local anaesthetic. Post-operative analgesia (pain relief) should also be provided. When castration is performed without local anaesthetic, this must be recorded as CRITICAL. When castration is performed without post-operative analgesia, even if local anaesthesia was used, it must be recorded as MAJOR. There is strong evidence that, when castration is performed without the use of post-operative analgesia, calves suffer a significant growth check.

Veal crates – these are individual pens used for rearing veal calves, typically up to six months of age. Veal crates severely restrict the movement of calves and prevent the expression of normal behaviours. They are not the same as calf kennels, which are used to provide individual accommodation for calves in the period after being removed from their mothers before group rearing. The use of veal crates must be recorded as CRITICAL.

Permanent tethering – in some production systems cows may be tied permanently or for the majority of the time. This is typically seen in small-scale, subsistence farming systems, but also in systems such as tie stall barns. Permanent tethering must be recorded as CRITICAL, however Nestlé recognises that for small-scale subsistence farmers with low numbers of cattle this may not be possible and will require context specific solutions, such as rotation of grazing or temporary tethering with opportunities for periods of unrestricted movement and exercise.

FOR PIGS

Gestation crates – these are severely confined crates for sows during the gestation (pregnancy) period, which do not permit the sows to turn around and which impose severe restrictions on the expression of natural behaviours. The use of gestation crates for sows must be reported as CRITICAL.

Tail docking – pigs tails are normally docked in an attempt to control tail biting, which itself is a serious pig welfare problem. Tail biting in pigs is generally associated with barren, unenriched environments. Tail docking in pigs must be recorded as CRITICAL. Farmers should be encouraged to develop alternative management methods to control tail biting.

Castration – in many countries pigs grown for meat production are not routinely castrated. Where castration is routinely done, it is normally performed surgically in the first few days of life, often without anaesthesia or analgesia (pain relief). When castration is performed without anaesthetic, this must be recorded as CRITICAL. When castration is performed without post-operative analgesia, even if local anaesthesia was used, it must be recorded as MAJOR.

Note – If surgical castration is necessary, it must be done with anaesthesia and post-operative analgesia (pain relief), even when performed on very young piglets.
FOR POULTRY AND EGGS

Cage systems – Nestlé recognises that cage systems, particularly barren battery cages, restrict the freedom of birds to express normal behaviour and that they may often exacerbate other animal welfare problems. The use of barren battery cages for laying hens or unenriched cage systems for broilers must be recorded as CRITICAL. The use of enriched cages for laying hens must be recorded as MAJOR.

Fast-growing practices – the animal health and welfare consequences of fast growth rates, not the growth rates themselves are of concern to Nestlé. If there is compelling evidence that over-selection or fast growth rates has resulted in demonstrable animal health or welfare problems, for example a high level of lameness in a broiler flock, this must be recorded as MAJOR.

FOR ALL SPECIES

Veterinary drugs – The appropriate use of antimicrobials is essential for protecting human and animal health, and for ensuring correct standards of animal welfare. We share concerns over the emergence of antimicrobial resistance. Findings of the irresponsible use of antibiotics and other veterinary drugs must be recorded as CRITICAL. This could include use of veterinary drugs beyond their expiry date, failure to observe mandatory meat and milk withdrawal periods, extra-label use of veterinary drugs without veterinary prescription and storage of veterinary drugs outside the recommended storage conditions.