

Inspector@work: Greece



I work as an inspector for the local government in a mountainous region in the northern part of Greece. I have been in this sector for longer than I like to admit, but I love it. I love learning from the people I work with, I love being able to share those lessons with other animal owners. Because so many of the farms are privately owned, they're all unique - this means they have unique problems and often unique and innovative solutions.

Most of my inspections are focused on horses working in the timber industry, removing the heavy loads in areas on the mountains that would otherwise be inaccessible to heavy machinery. I also do routine inspections for sheep farms, with around 300-500 milking ewes. The herds and farms used to be much smaller, but in the last 5-10 years we've seen a lot of intensification in the sheep milk industry.

We are there to help the farmers find a solution, not to penalise them.

Of course, we impose penalty fines when animal welfare standards aren't being met - but this is not the main objective. When people understand that we are there to help them find a solution, to share knowledge and learn with them, that having healthy strong animals will help them overall - then we are able to educate more. It's most often about changing the mindset - once someone understands why there is a problem, they are more motivated to change and improve. Something like providing water... there may be plenty of water, but it's in a trough that keeps getting kicked over. Once a farmer understands that having a secured trough, rather than a loose bucket, means the animals can access water *ad lib*, without him having to fill it up 3, 4 times a day. I don't tell them how to fix it, I work through it step by step to understand where they are in their process.

My experience suggests that farmers *want* to learn, they want to train and they want to learn from each other. This is where I feel valuable - I can transfer that knowledge from farm to farm. I see that difference, once someone has a mindset change - then they are excited to show me how they've innovated and adapted when I return for the follow up inspection. Those kind of visits motivate me.

Animal inspection in Greece used to be about maximising production, and making sure the animals' health could withstand those requirements. Now it's changed to being focused on animal welfare as a whole. This doesn't mean that people, animal owners didn't care about animal welfare - it just wasn't a term we used back then.

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I find the wording of regulations sometimes the most challenging - what does 'sufficient' mean? What is 'enough' water in a heat wave? This is frustrating because there is no exact number. This is where having more precise definitions would help, more concrete animal-based measures so that I can help the farmer understand why the provision is not meeting the animal's welfare needs.

EU regulations are always changing and updating. This is where having intercountry connections helps a lot - diversity of experience leads to better practices and improvements in infrastructure. For example, our greatest welfare challenge is coping with heat and heat waves - a lot of my time is spent working with farmers on how to manage core body temperatures, how to improve ventilation or learning from farmers on how they've innovated their farm structures to manage ventilation without automation (it's a lot of windows!)