Description of online news reporting mistreatment cases involving farm animals

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Historically farm animals have been considered mainly as food providers and this view may be linked to less concern regarding animal welfare. According to Brazilian law 9.605/1998, it is illegal to abuse, mistreat, injure or mutilate animals, and it seems important to understand how society interprets this law in relation to farm animals. The aim of this study was to describe online news regarding mistreatment of farm animals published in the last ten years. We searched news available online using google, with the key-words "news", "mistreatment", "farm animals", specifying the years from 2006 to 2015. On search settings it was defined ten results per page and, for each year, we read all the news within the first ten pages that appeared in "all" and "news" on the search filter, to verify which news matched with our study. Texts which appeared on blogs were not considered. We classified the newsinto the following four groups of animal welfare indicators: nutricional, comfort, health and behavioral indicators. To test our hypothesis of an increase in the quantity of such texts, two periods of five years were compared, from 2006 to 2010 and from 2011 to 2015, using the Mann-Whitney test. Most of the relevant texts were found in the six first pages for each search. In total, we found 24 texts and in six of these more than one animal species were involved. Considering all texts, 12 involved poultry, 11 bovine, 5 pigs, 3 goats, one involved sheep and one rabbit. When the two time periods were compared, there was a significant increase in the amount of animal mistreatment reports for the most recent five years (2011 to 2015; P=0.0227). The median value for the first five years (2006 to 2010) was 1 (minimum=0; maximum=1) and in the last five years (2011 to 2015) was 5 (1; 7). We noted that each text was classified in more than one problem category. The most frequent group was that of behavioral indicators (21 reports), followed by health indicators (18 reports), comfort indicators (15 reports) and nutritional indicators (8 reports). Concerns about crimes against farm animals seems to be increasing over the period studied. It is expected that this trend will continue due to the huge numbers of animals used for production in Brazil, the variation in production scenarios and the increase in societal concern for animal welfare. Our results indicate the need for greater attention regarding mistreatment of farm animals.