



**EVALUATION OF THE USE OF GOOD ANIMAL WELFARE PRACTICES
IN RODEO EVENTS IN NORTHERN MINAS GERAIS**

**AVALIAÇÃO DO USO DAS BOAS PRÁTICAS DE BEM-ESTAR ANIMAL
EM VAQUEJADAS NO NORTE DE MINAS GERAIS**

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RESUMO

A equideocultura é um setor de grande relevância para o agronegócio brasileiro, movimentando bilhões de reais e gerando milhares de empregos. Entre as atividades equestres, a vaquejada destaca-se por seu valor econômico e cultural, especialmente no Norte de Minas Gerais. No entanto, a prática levanta discussões sobre o bem-estar animal. Este estudo avaliou as condições de bem-estar em vaquejadas da região, por meio de observações diretas e aplicação de fichas padronizadas. O presente estudo tem como objetivo avaliar o bem-estar animal durante o circuito de vaquejada em diferentes regiões do Norte de Minas Gerais. Os resultados indicaram avanços estruturais, como presença de juízes de bem-estar, médicos veterinários e currais adequados, porém revelaram falhas na adoção de medidas de proteção, como o uso de protetores de cauda, além da persistência de maus-tratos. Conclui-se que, embora existam melhorias na fiscalização e nas práticas de manejo, o bem-estar animal ainda não é plenamente garantido, sendo necessárias ações educativas e a implementação de normas mais rigorosas.

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Palavras-chave: Equideocultura. Economia brasileira. Bem-estar animal. Vaquejada. Agronegócio.

ABSTRACT

Equine breeding is a sector of great importance to Brazilian agribusiness, generating billions of reais and thousands of jobs. Among equestrian activities, vaquejada (a traditional Brazilian rodeo-like event) stands out for its economic and cultural value, especially in Northern Minas Gerais. However, the practice raises discussions about animal welfare. This study evaluated animal welfare conditions in vaquejada events in the region through direct observations and the application of standardized forms. The present study aims to assess animal welfare during the vaquejada circuit in different regions of Northern Minas Gerais. The results indicated structural advances, such as the presence of welfare judges, veterinarians, and adequate corrals, but revealed shortcomings in the adoption of protective measures, such as the use of tail protectors, in addition to the persistence of animal abuse. It is concluded that, although there are improvements in inspection and management practices, animal welfare is not yet fully guaranteed, and educational actions and the implementation of more rigorous standards are necessary.

Keywords: Equine breeding. Brazilian economy. Animal welfare. Rodeo. Agribusiness.

INTRODUCTION

Equine culture represents a sector of great importance within Brazilian agribusiness, moving approximately R\$ 30 billion and generating hundreds of thousands of direct and indirect jobs. Horse breeding and the practice of equestrian sports, such as vaquejada, play a fundamental role in the economy, especially in regions like Northern Minas Gerais. In addition to promoting income and job opportunities, these activities contribute to the preservation of cultural and regional traditions. It is estimated that the equestrian sports segment moves annually more

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than R\$ 800 million and is responsible for approximately 720,000 jobs (CNA, 2022; Moura, 2023).

Vaquejada, which became popular from the 1940s onwards, is one example of a sport that is gaining increasing visibility and strongly drives agribusiness. However, this practice raises debates about animal welfare, since the competition can involve risks for both horses and cattle. Given that the practice consists of a competition between cowboys mounted on horses who intend to bring down a bull by pulling its tail. To do this, the cowboys use a type of glue fixed to the animal's tail, pulled with force to make it fall. And often, the bulls suffer serious injuries that can lead to death (Faleiros et al., 2016). To ensure the health and welfare of the animals involved, strict rules were implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and other associations, such as ABVAQ, which seek to balance competition with animal protection.

Animal welfare has become a priority within equine culture, following guidelines based on the "Five Freedoms," which ensure that animals are free from hunger, thirst, pain, discomfort, and can express their natural behavior. Appropriate management practices, from feeding to transportation and housing, are fundamental to minimizing stress and ensuring the physical integrity of horses (Autran et al, 2024). In vaquejada competitions, horses are subjected to intense physical effort of short duration, which involves rapid starts, abrupt directional changes, and sudden stops, requiring great muscular strength (Xavier, 2002). Like human athletes, these animals frequently perform close to the limit of their physical capacity (Marc et al, 2000). When unfavorable environmental factors—such as excessive heat, noise, changes in feeding, and contact with other animals—are added, the risk of physical and psychological injuries increases (Angeli, 2005). Given the above, the objective of this study is to evaluate animal welfare practices in vaquejadas in northern Minas Gerais.

MATERIAL E MÉTODOS

Between July and October 2024, research was conducted at different vaquejada circuits in various regions of Northern Minas Gerais. Data collection was performed at regulated events that followed the standards established by the

Brazilian Vaquejada Association (ABVAQ). For data collection, a printed evaluation form was used, adapted from the methodology of Barbosa and Oliveira (2023), and cameras for photographic records of the animals and the environment. The work was submitted to the Ethics Committee on Animal Use (CEUA), according to Opinion 19/2017/CONCEA.

An animal welfare evaluation form (Appendix A) was established. Data collection involved meticulous observation of the horses and accessories used by competitors, performed by each Animal Welfare judge. Each item present on the evaluation form was completed according to inspections made during the circuit. When necessary, questions were directed to those responsible for the animals, and evaluations were conducted with special attention to ensure adequate observation of animal welfare status. Structural aspects were recorded using cameras, including parking for trucks, loading and unloading points for horses, track model, water tanks for bathing horses, presence of the Animal Welfare judge, conditions of cattle in corrals, troughs with food and water, and the quality of tail and horn protectors for cattle.

Relative and absolute frequencies for each evaluated question were obtained, and the collected data were analyzed using the FREQ procedure of the Statistical Analysis System Software (SAS, 2014), generating frequency tables and applying the chi-square test for statistical analysis.

RESULTADOS E DISCUSSÃO

Table 1 presents an evaluation of animal welfare in vaquejadas held in the northern region of Minas Gerais, addressing aspects of structure, management, and supervision during events, where data were collected through observations and fixed evaluations. Overall, the results demonstrate advances in structural and supervisory aspects, but there are still significant failures in specific animal protection measures, which shows that animal welfare is not yet fully guaranteed in the observed practices.

Table 1 - Evaluation of animal welfare in rodeos in the northern region of Minas Gerais

Presence of the animal welfare judge.	
Yes: 100 %	No: 0 %
Team of veterinarians on call with equipment and medications.	
Yes: 90 %	No: 10 %
Corrals with resting areas and troughs with water and food.	
Yes: 100%	No: 0 %
Use of tail protectors in cattle	
Yes: 0 %	No: 100 %
Presence of spurs that do not cut.	
Yes: 100 %	No: 0 %
Use of the whip by the cowboy	
Yes: 0 %	No: 100 %
In case of injury, the stride is cancelled.	
Yes: 100 %	No: 0 %
Yes: 0 %	No: 100 %
There was filming for resources.	
Yes: 100 %	No: 0 %
Appropriate facilities	
Yes: 100 %	No: 0 %

Source: Author's own work

In all evaluated events, the presence of an animal welfare judge was recorded, in addition to 100% of corrals offering rest areas with access to water and food. The veterinary team was available at 90% of events, with equipment and medications for emergency care. The complete presence of animal welfare judges indicates a formal concern with supervising practices and complying with rules that seek to prevent mistreatment. The availability of veterinarians, along with equipment and medications, demonstrates a satisfactory level of technical support for immediate care in case of injuries or emergencies, although the ideal would be 100%. At all events, the presence of corrals with rest areas, water, and food was observed. This condition ensures comfort and recovery for the animals, respecting basic physiological needs.

The use of tail protectors was nonexistent (0% of events), since this equipment is only used in officially sanctioned vaquejadas. On the other hand, non-cutting spurs were used in 100% of observed cases. The whip was not used by cowboys, maintaining the prohibition at all evaluated events. In cases where injuries occurred, the run was annulled 100% of the time. The absence of tail protectors is cause for

concern, as these devices are fundamental to preventing fractures and injuries to the base of the tail, one of the regions most susceptible to damage during the takedown. This failure represents partial non-compliance with Normative Instruction No. 12/2016 of MAPA, which recommends specific measures to reduce the risk of physical damage to animals used in vaquejadas. The fact that no event showed complete absence of signs of mistreatment suggests that, despite structural improvements, there are still occurrences of stress, pain, or injury situations, possibly related to the very nature of the practice, which involves intense physical restraint of animals. At all events, there were recordings through filming. Filming ensures transparency and the possibility of reviewing occurrences, while adequate facilities favor safe handling. There was a record of 100% of events with the presence of mistreatment.

Depending on weather conditions, water trucks were deployed to moisten the cattle in corrals and irrigate the track, which was then graded by a tractor. The scoring area received an additional layer of sand approximately 50 cm thick to cushion the fall of the bulls. It was also observed that all competitors used 5 cm pulling gloves, according to the ABVAQ standard, to prevent damage to the animals' tail protectors. Non-injurious spurs and properly insulated harnesses were also used.

The role of the veterinarian in vaquejada is fundamental to ensuring animal welfare and guaranteeing compliance with regulatory standards. Since the officialization of this practice, various measures aimed at animal welfare have become mandatory, including the presence of a "welfare judge," responsible for evaluating the physical and behavioral conditions of cattle before, during, and after the competition. Additionally, the use of tail protectors is required to prevent possible injuries in this region. The technical supervisor, usually a veterinarian or animal scientist, has the function of overseeing all stages of the event, ensuring compliance with required standards. It is this professional's responsibility to prepare a detailed report, subsequently forwarded to the Brazilian Vaquejada Association (ABVAQ). These veterinarians, specialized in large animals, must also be prepared to offer emergency care whenever necessary.

Animal welfare constitutes a multidimensional concept that encompasses both physical and emotional aspects, directly influencing the quality of life of animals. Strict compliance with the “five freedoms”—absence of hunger, thirst, pain, fear, and stress—represents a fundamental principle in this context. In vaquejada, these guidelines aim to minimize negative impacts on the health and behavior of animals used in the practice. In the analyzed vaquejada competitions, the presence of the Animal Welfare judge was observed, a professional responsible for supervising the event and ensuring that intentional mistreatment does not occur, guaranteeing adequate conditions of management and safety. Each event had corrals properly equipped with rest areas, as well as troughs containing water and food continuously available for the animals (ABVAQ, 2020; Brasil, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of animal welfare indicators in vaquejadas held in the northern region of Minas Gerais showed that, although there are significant advances in infrastructure and the presence of technical supervision, the full welfare of animals is still not guaranteed. It is necessary to improve supervision mechanisms, intensify training for professionals and competitors, and make mandatory the adoption of protective devices, such as the MMC tail protector. Such measures are fundamental to align vaquejada with the principles of the five freedoms of animal welfare and current legal requirements in Brazil, promoting an ethically responsible, technically safe, and socially sustainable sport practice.

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ANNEX A

ANIMAL WELFARE ASSESSMENT FORM FOR RODEO EVENTS

Municipality:

Name of the rodeo:

Number of animals:

1. Presence of the animal welfare judge.

Yes () No ()

Notes: _____

2. On-call team of veterinarians with equipment and medications.

Yes () No ()

Notes _____

3. Appropriate facilities.

Yes () No ()

Notes: _____

4. Corrals with adequate resting areas and troughs with good quality water and feed.

Yes () No ()

Notes: _____

5. Use of MMC tail protectors in cattle.

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

6. The tail protector must be removed immediately after each performance.

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

7. Horn protectors for cattle when necessary..

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

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8. Soft track with 50 cm of sand to cushion the impact of the animals on the ground.

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

9. Scoring zone of 9 meters.

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

10. Competitors' gloves must be standard, without sharp edges or slant, and up to 5cm in height, without cutting materials or any devices that could damage the tail protector or the animal's physical integrity.

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

11. Isolated headstall and harness chains.

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

12. Spurs that don't cut.

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

13. Filming for resources.

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

14. Does the cowboy use a whip?

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

15. If an injury occurs, is the stride cancelled?

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

16. Is there any animal at the event that has an illness, disability, injury, or is in a state of cachexia?

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____

17. Absence of any and all types of mistreatment.

Yes () No ()

Notes : _____