

Animal welfare



March 2007

Ensuring the humane and responsible treatment of farmed animals

Animal welfare is an issue of great importance for Europeans. The farming of animals is no longer seen as merely a means of food production, but also as an ethical concern. Increasingly, there is a public sense of responsibility for animals which are under human care. Moreover, in consumers' minds, the well-being of farmed animals is strongly associated with the quality, and even safety, of food.

The EU has been developing animal welfare legislation for over 30 years and continues to champion animal welfare initiatives, both within Europe and internationally. EU action with regard to animal welfare is based on careful scientific study and feedback from consumers and stakeholders.

CONTEXT AND NEED FOR EUROPEAN ACTION

What is "animal welfare"?

- The starting point of animal welfare policy is the recognition that animals are **sentient beings** and should be treated in such a way that they do not suffer unnecessarily. It concerns those animals which are under human care (e.g. on the farm, during transport, or at the time of slaughter).
- The so-called "Five Freedoms" are widely recognised as defining ideal states of animal welfare, and form the basis of EU policy:
 1. **Freedom from hunger and thirst** – access to fresh water and a diet for full health and vigour;
 2. **Freedom from discomfort** – an appropriate environment with shelter and comfortable rest areas;
 3. **Freedom from pain, injury and disease** – prevention or rapid treatment;
 4. **Freedom to express normal behaviour** – adequate space and facilities, company of the animal's own kind;
 5. **Freedom from fear and distress** – conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Why is animal welfare important for animal health?

- Lack of an adequate standard of animal welfare compromises the ability of animals to **grow, reproduce and survive**.
- Maintaining an adequate level of animal welfare reduces the incidence of disease and improves **animal health**. A study by the Welfare Quality® project found that improving an animal's welfare can positively affect animal pathology and disease resistance.

How important is animal welfare for citizens?

- Consumers are concerned about the humane and **responsible treatment** of animals. This has been consistently shown through EU surveys, public campaigns and communication between the EU institutions and European citizens. There has been strong public support for any animal welfare measures introduced at EU-level to date.

- Some 62% of European consumers, for example, said that they would change their **shopping habits** in order to purchase products which are more animal welfare-friendly.¹ In addition, 43% say they consider animal welfare some or all of the time when they purchase meat.
- Consumers also believe that they can make a difference. 74% of EU consumers believe they can positively impact animal welfare through their **purchasing decisions**.
- A large majority of EU consumers would like to see more visible indications of good animal welfare standards on **food labels**, to enable them to choose their food based on animal welfare considerations. Of those surveyed, 39% were in favour of written information on labels, 35% supported the idea of logos and 26% backed the use of a grading/star system on packaging.²
- There is also a link in consumers' minds between animal welfare and the **quality of food**. Nearly half perceive food produced under high animal welfare standards to be of better quality.
- Nearly 90% of consumers say that the same animal welfare standards should apply to **imports** as to goods produced within the EU.

What are the economic implications of ensuring animal welfare?

- The primary production of animal products is a **major industry**. In 2006, the European animal production generated output valued at € 130 billion.³
- Animal welfare is an important part of the movement towards **sustainable farming**. Such farming methods do not exhaust resources and they contribute to rural development. Under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), farmers can receive some compensation for the costs of adapting to animal welfare legislation or applying standards that are stricter than the legal minimum.

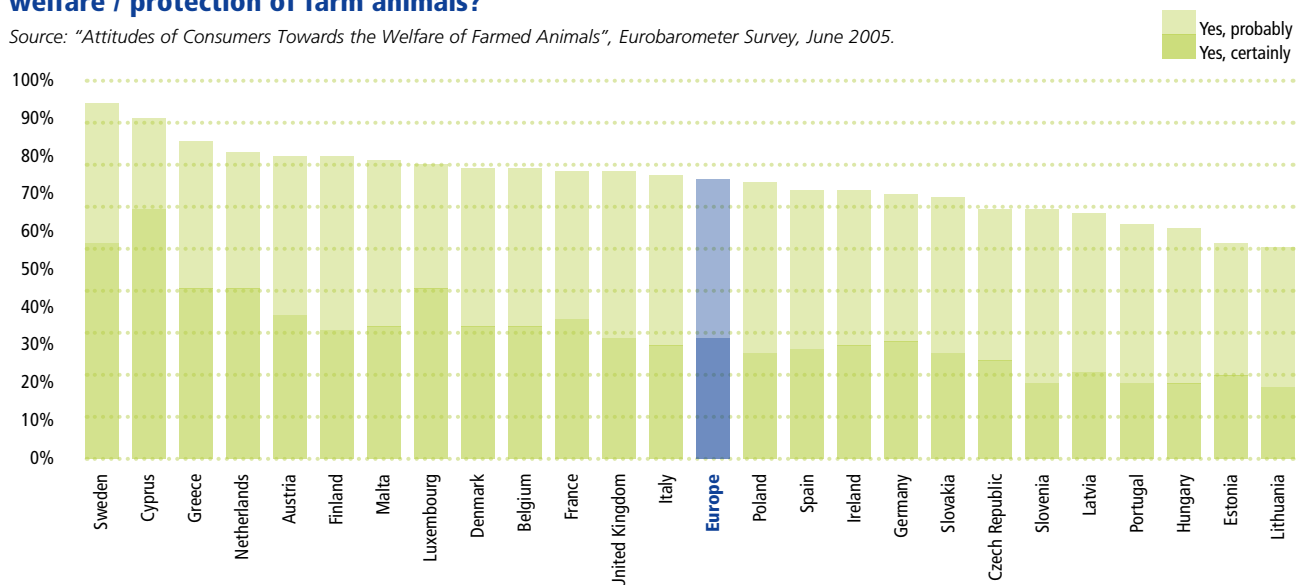
- Maintaining higher standards of animal welfare sometimes leads to increased production and transport costs, but these are often only marginally higher. For example, the **extra production cost** of an egg produced from laying hens raised in a barn rather than laying hens raised in a battery cage is only 1.3 euro cents, and the extra cost of producing a free-range egg is only 2.6 cents.⁴
- Higher production costs can be offset by the reduced incidence of disease, **higher yields** and better product quality resulting from improved standards of animal welfare. Studies have shown that these cost savings can be as high as 17% of turnover, with sharp increases during epidemics.⁵
- Promoting higher standards of animal welfare is a **business opportunity**. Many European retailers are already using animal welfare in their advertising and promotion to differentiate themselves from competitors. As consumer awareness of animal welfare issues continues to rise, the demand for more animal welfare-friendly products is growing, giving producers who maintain high standards a competitive advantage.

What is the added value of action at EU level?

- Animal welfare is a **cross-border trade** issue both between EU countries and with non-EU countries. Therefore, it cannot be adequately addressed solely at the national level.
- Moreover, because animal welfare has **multiple dimensions** – ethical, scientific, economic and political – a coordinated, Europe-wide approach is more effective than a unilateral one.
- Addressing animal welfare at EU level enables the pooling of **scientific knowledge** and other expertise, which allows for better policy-making.
- In presenting a common front on animal welfare initiatives, the EU is increasingly seen as an example for **other regions of the world**.

Do you believe that buying animal welfare friendly products could have a positive impact on the welfare / protection of farm animals?

Source: "Attitudes of Consumers Towards the Welfare of Farmed Animals", Eurobarometer Survey, June 2005.



THE EU'S ACTIONS

EU standards on Farmed Animals

- **The EU recognised that animals are sentient beings** in the Protocol to the EC Treaty on the Protection and Welfare of Animals (in force since 1999).
- **On the farm:** The EU has established minimum standards governing the welfare of farmed animals. It has also laid down specific rules for laying hens, calves and pigs. By 2012, all battery cages will be prohibited.
- **During transport:** A new Regulation in force since January 2007 requires that operators be specifically certified to care for animals. Every new vehicle used for the transport of animals (over 8 hours) must meet minimum standards. Satellite positioning systems will allow closer monitoring of compliance with EU rules on travel and rest times.
- **At slaughter:** EU legislation on slaughtering practices aims to minimise the pain and suffering of animals through suitably equipped and maintained slaughterhouses and humane stunning methods.
- **Cat and Dog Fur Ban:** In 2006, the European Commission adopted a proposal to ban the import, export and sale of cat and dog fur in the EU.
- **Cosmetics Testing and Marketing Ban:** Since September 2004, the EU has banned finished cosmetic products from being tested on animals.

- **Scientific experiments:** Any experiments on animals have to be carried out in compliance with stringent EU rules.

Raising animal welfare standards globally

- The promotion of better animal welfare standards **internationally** is a key goal for the EU.
- When possible, the EU tries to include animal welfare in **bilateral veterinary agreements**, for example the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreements signed with Chile and Canada.
- Experts from all over the world can participate in specific **EU training courses** on animal welfare.
- Through participation in **trade-related technical assistance** (TRTA) projects, the EU has helped experts from developing countries to understand standards in the field of animal welfare.
- The EU is party to several of the **Council of Europe's Conventions** for the protection of animals and actively contributes to the work of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006-2010

Concrete measures to improve the protection and welfare of animals are outlined in an Action Plan for the period 2006-2010. The Plan details five main areas of action:

- **Raise existing standards of animal protection and welfare**
- **Promote policy-orientated research on animal protection and welfare**
- **Introduce standardised animal welfare indicators**
- **Raise awareness and involvement by both animal handlers and consumers**
- **Continue to support and initiate international initiatives**

The Action Plan on Animal Welfare is being put into practice through a series of concrete initiatives including:

- **Proposal to Protect the Welfare of Broiler Chickens:** The European Commission has proposed new rules to enhance welfare standards for broilers on

farms and to monitor them more effectively.

- **Information and Tools:** the EU is developing information and tools designed to educate the general public and raise awareness of animal welfare issues. An interactive web-based tool, for example, will be used to explain animal welfare issues to children, the consumers of tomorrow.
- **Research under the 7th Framework Programme (FP7):** A research area under the FP7 aims to optimise animal health, production and welfare across many policy areas.
- **European Centre:** The EU is working on the establishment of a European centre for the protection and welfare of animals. This Centre should help to support the establishment of the first European label on animal welfare.
- **Training:** The first international training workshop on "Animal Welfare Standards" was held in September 2006.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

The EU has helped to fund many animal welfare-related research projects, including:

- The **Welfare Quality**[®] project concerns the integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain. The project is developing reliable on-farm monitoring and product information systems, along with practical species-specific strategies to improve animal welfare. Forty institutes and universities representing 13 European countries are taking part. The project was started in May 2004 and will take five years to complete.
> <http://www.welfarequality.net/everyone>
- The **LAMECOW** project takes a multi-disciplinary approach to reducing lameness and improving dairy cow welfare by assessing existing husbandry systems and studying the biomechanics of bovine hooves.
> http://template.bio.warwick.ac.uk/E+E/lamecow/public_html
- The **PIGCAS** project aims to provide information on the welfare implications of surgical castration in pigs, in particular taking into account the practice of pig castration in the EU, stakeholder attitudes to this practice and possible alternatives to existing surgical interventions.
> <http://www.rennes.inra.fr/pigcas/index.htm>
- The **LayWel** project, concluded in 2006, studies the welfare implications of changes in production systems for laying hens. The project examines such issues as housing systems, behaviour, physiology and stress indicators, and productivity and egg quality.
> <http://www.laywel.eu>

1. "Attitudes of EU citizens towards Animal Welfare", Eurobarometer Survey, March 2007.
2. "Attitudes of consumers towards the welfare of farmed animals", Eurobarometer Survey, June 2005.
3. Source: Eurostat.
4. Costs calculated by Compassion in World Farming based on the "Study on the socio-economic implications of the various systems to keep laying hens", Final Report for the European Commission submitted by Agra CEAS Consulting Ltd., updated version 2005.
5. Source: Institute of Animal Health (UK).

FURTHER INFORMATION

- European Commission's website
<http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare>
- Links to animal welfare research projects
http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/research/index_en.htm
- Seminars
http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/seminars/index_en.htm
- Surveys
http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/survey/index_en.htm
- EU-funded Agricultural research portal
http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/index_en.html
- FP7 projects
http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/home_en.html
- Website of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)
http://www.oie.int/eng/en_index.htm
- Website of the Council of Europe (CoE)
http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/legal_co-operation/biological_safety,_use_of_animals
- Eurogroup for Animals
<http://www.eurogroupforanimals.org>
- Compassion in World Farming (CIWF)
<http://www.ciwf.org.uk/index.shtml>

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