

ANIMAL WELFARE IN THE MARKET: THE NEED FOR INFORMATION TO CONSUMERS

BACKGROUND

There is rising consumer interest in animal welfare, and recent food scandals (like the horse meat scandal) have highlighted existing shortcomings in the food chain. Consumers want to know where their meat and animal products come from and how the animals have been treated (i.e. method of production). Several studies, including various Eurobarometer reports of the European Commission from 2005, 2007, 2010 and other recent research verify these claims. Furthermore, animal welfare is not an isolated subject. Several scientific references show the negative impacts that most industrial farming methods have not only on animal welfare but also on the environment, climate change, biodiversity, and public health. Thus ensuring higher animal welfare is not only an ethical and consumer concern, it is also part of the solution to numerous environmental and health problems.

For more than 20 years, some animal welfare organizations have been working successfully together with various food chain actors to improve animal welfare in the food chain to the benefit of animals and consumers alike. Eurogroup for Animals, as the primary advocacy organization representing animal welfare organizations in the EU, is now working closely with these members to further develop and support such efforts, which includes the development of higher welfare standards in farming and support for improved information to consumers. But improved EU policy support is needed to ensure that animal welfare gets anchored into the market.

CURRENT SITUATION

Recent research shows that the average EU consumer is not able to know where the majority of the animal products they eat, such as several types of meat, including processed foods, and milk, come from, nor do they know how those animal products were produced. This lack of information and awareness has consequences for animal welfare, restricting the ability of consumers to decipher between products that meet higher animal welfare standards and those that do little to respect animal sentience.

Based on the label alone, most consumers simply cannot tell which farm system their meat and dairy products come from, and they are likely to misinterpret the method of production, which ranges from intensively reared to extensively reared products such as free range and organic products. Information on slaughter methods is also currently absent, and consumers often do not know whether the animal products they consume come from animals that have been humanely stunned or not before slaughter.

Consumers need to be better informed, and they also need to be provided with more sustainable choices in order to drive improved animal welfare from the market.

ACTION URGENTLY NEEDED

Eurogroup for Animals calls on the European Commission to improve information to consumers and to support higher animal welfare standards in farming. If consumers have the right information when purchasing food, then they can make informed choices based on the impact their food has on animals, their health, and the environment. And only then can consumers have more confidence in the food they eat and in the EU farming systems that they support with each purchase. Farmers and retailers can also capitalize on a growing consumer market.

- **Support mandatory method of production labeling of poultry meat. Mandatory method of production labelling already exists for shell eggs** – and method of catch labelling was agreed for EU fish products in June 2013. We believe that mandatory labels can work alongside existing voluntary schemes to increase information to consumers and ensure higher welfare outcomes. The current review of the EU poultry meat marketing regulation offers a perfect opportunity to change optional terms to mandatory terms, which would drive sustainable development in the higher welfare poultry meat sector, as has already happened in the egg sector since mandatory labelling was introduced in 2004. Poultry meat that does not meet the criteria for any of the current marketing terms should be required to be labelled 'intensive indoor'. (see also <http://www.labellingmatters.org>).
- **Undertake an impact assessment on method of production labelling for other meat and dairy products, to aid delivery of the 2012-15 Animal Welfare Strategy**, which recognises the importance of information to consumers.
- **Support credible, voluntary farm assurance schemes that deliver higher animal welfare outcomes for livestock species**, such as have been developed by our members in the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, and Austria. Some of these schemes have delivered significant growth in the higher welfare sector – even throughout the economic crisis for industry-wide sectors, like the pig meat sector in the UK, where labelling systems underpinned by robust outcome-based assessments have led to market shares as high as 30%. Such schemes and related higher welfare standards should receive rural development and promotional support where relevant, including support through green public procurement, to ensure that they can better succeed in all relevant sectors and markets across the EU.

For more information about existing higher animal welfare farm assurance schemes in the EU that exceed the minimum EU legal standards, please view the respective websites of our members:

- **In Austria** (and other countries, including Germany): <http://www.vierpfoten.de/service/guetesiegel/>
- **In Denmark**: <http://www.dyrenesbeskyttelse.dk/#pV6g9tleutc26SOS.97>
- **In Germany**: <http://www.tierschutzlabel.info/home/>

- **In the Netherlands:** <http://beterleven.dierenbescherming.nl/>
- **In the United Kingdom:** <http://www.freedomfood.co.uk/industry/rspca-welfare-standards>

Through these labels millions of animals have been given a better quality of life, and farmers have been given the opportunity to invest in better welfare standards that have improved their ability to meet the demands of their customers. Animal Welfare Schemes are a real win-win situation.

- **Only promote food products and systems of production which are better for animals, the environment, and humans.** This includes favoring more balanced diets, including less and better meat and more plantbased foods.
- **Label animal products properly to indicate whether animals are stunned or not before slaughter.** Consumers have a right to know if they are eating products from animals that have received derogations from generally accepted, humane slaughter procedures.
- **Ensure that origin labeling is also supported where appropriate as a policy tool for increasing transparency in the food chain.** Currently, for some products like horsemeat, there is no obligation for even providing this very basic information.
- **Collect information and support relevant consumer research on animal welfare.** Updated research and Eurobarometers that integrate animal welfare into surveys of relevance should be used to assess consumer interests and behavior.
- **Put in place educational, informational, labeling, and promotional tools to help citizens and consumers** make more informed choices when buying animal based products in terms of impacts on animal welfare and wider sustainability. Improved information to consumers about how farm animals are kept will open new markets for quality products.
- **The above examples help to show what steps can be taken to improve animal welfare in the market.** Of course better labelling, education and promotion are not a panacea to all animal welfare concerns. Better information to consumers must also be complemented by improved legislation and enforcement to ensure that animal welfare is better recognised and respected in all farming systems, all the way from the birth of an animal through to slaughter.