

The opportunities to achieve higher welfare in rabbit farming

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More Humanity towards Animals



FOUR PAWS – rabbit welfare

- Long running campaign work for the improvement of rabbit welfare and husbandry
- Contributed to the Austrian ban of cage housing for fattening rabbits which is in place since 2012
- Cooperating with several stakeholders towards sustainable solutions



Rabbit production

- Rabbits are the second most farmed species in the EU and in the world
- Highly intensified production system
 - Cage keeping on wire mesh
 - Single keeping of does
 - Barren environment



Rabbit keeping

- Keeping systems that are not accepted anymore for most other species
 - Animals in cages
- Insufficient scientific research towards welfare improvements
- No EU legal instruments



Source: FOUR PAWS International



Welfare issues I

- Species specific behaviour is severely restricted in cages
- Incapable of standing-up > spinal deformations
- Space allowance:
450 – 600cm²
less than the surface of
an A4 sheet



Source: FOUR PAWS International



Welfare issues II



Source: FOUR PAWS International

- Wire mesh -> deformation of anterior limbs and injuries
- Stereotypies and aggressions
- Many issues likely to be linked to severe pain



Welfare issues III

- Respiratory problems and ulcerated eyes due to high ammonia level



Source: FOUR PAWS International



Welfare issues IV



Source: FOUR PAWS International

- Intensive feeding without hay or straw
- Artificial insemination with short life cycle of does (100 % replacement after one year)



Welfare issues V

- High morbidity and mortality due to enteric and respiratory infections - higher compared to other farmed species
- Widespread use of antibiotics in the rabbit production industry



Welfare Issues VI

- Transport:
 - Stress for animals
- Critical points:
 - Density in transport cages
 - Environmental conditions on transporter (rabbits loaded in multi floor cage stands) - heat stress during transport detrimental for welfare



Welfare Issues VII

- Slaughter:
 - Critical points
 - Animals in waiting area aware of slaughtering process – additional stressor
 - Insufficient stunning occurs when electrical stunning used
- Electrical stunning used in commercial abattoirs – field of research and improvement



**Momentum towards solutions is
building**

**The opportunities for
improvements are there**

They need your endorsement!



National legal requirements

- Austria: ban of single cage keeping for fattening rabbits since 2012
- Belgium: park housing from 2016 onwards for fattening rabbits, 2021 for does incl. research and development
- Germany: since 2014 legal requirements for rabbits (cage keeping still allowed)



Examples



Source: FOUR PAWS International / Gabriel Paun



Source: FOUR PAWS International



What is needed

- Setting EU-wide legal requirements for rabbits (including welfare aspects)
- Ban of cage keeping in Europe
- Scale-up innovative pioneer initiatives
- Signal from retail sector



Summary

- Conventional rabbit farming not acceptable due to highly impaired rabbit welfare
- Ban of cages for all rabbits a priority, progress towards that ends exists at a small scale
- Strong signal from EU essential to drive scaleable progress





**Thank you
for your attention!**

Further references

- <http://www.animalequality.de/albtraum-der-kaninchen>

