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DRAFT REPORT

on the implementation report on on-farm animal welfare,
(2020/2085(INI))

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

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EXPLANATORY STATEMENT – SUMMARY OF FACTS AND FINDINGS

This report addresses the implementation of EU legislation on the welfare of food-producing animals. It focuses on Directive 98/58/EC concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes, Directive 1999/74/EC on the protection of laying hens, Directive 2007/43/EC on the protection of chickens kept for meat production, Directive 2008/119/EC on the protection of calves, and Directive 2008/120/EC on the protection of pigs. Welfare issues in animal transport or slaughtering practices are not covered. The report draws on the conclusions of the EPRS study ‘Animal welfare on the farm – ex-post evaluation of EU legislation: prospects for animal welfare labelling at EU level’.

Findings

Implementation of the legislation

Most stakeholders agreed that the current legislation needs to be updated to incorporate scientific advances in our understanding of animals and technical progress in farming practices.

On-farm animal welfare legislation has not proved an unalloyed success: some directives have led to positive structural changes to the way in which animals are reared (the pigs, calves and laying hens directives), but the general directive and broiler directive have had little effect. Assessment of the legislation was limited by the quality and consistency of the information available in the assessment of the legislation: it was not possible to get a clear picture of what is happening on the ground.

The reasons for this include the failure to lay down specific requirements in the legislation regarding compliance and monitoring methods. The fact that the Member States have been left so much discretion has led to inconsistency in the implementation of the legislation.

The legislation was found to be broadly consistent with legislation on animal health, although it could be better integrated with other EU policies.

Labelling

EU animal welfare labelling systems, most of which are private, are all voluntary and incorporate other aspects such as traceability, sustainability and health. The way they work and were designed varies considerably. There is no consensus among stakeholders on the prospect of mandatory labelling at EU level.

Conclusions

The way the current legislation is worded makes it impossible to properly analyse its implementation. The Commission should update these directives to make them more effective with a view not to tightening the rules up but to providing greater clarity and going into greater detail, and thus ensuring that the Member States read and interpret them in a more uniform manner.

For that to happen, the European Parliament, the relevant national authorities and farmers will have to be involved.

Labelling rules could be devised, providing a practical framework but leaving operators room for manoeuvre to ensure a balance is maintained on the market.

What is more, a clear distinction should be made between the objectives of the legislation and practical measures. Most of the practical measures provided for in animal welfare legislation have been taken, and where there are objectives that have yet to be fully achieved, it is because they are very general and very ambitious. Regardless of any developments, discussions will have to be held in conjunction with farmers, applying a pragmatic and realistic approach to both farming and commercial practices.

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the implementation report on on-farm animal welfare, (2020/2085(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the implementation report on on-farm animal welfare,
- having regard to Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes¹,
- having regard to Council Directive 1999/74/EC of 19 July 1999 laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens²,
- having regard to Council Directive 2007/43/EC of 28 June 2007 laying down minimum rules for the protection of chickens kept for meat production³,
- having regard to Council Directive 2008/119/EC of 18 December 2008 laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves⁴,
- having regard to Council Directive 2008/120/EC of 18 December 2008 laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs⁵,
- having regard to the June 2021 European Parliamentary Research Service paper ‘Implementation of EU legislation on “on-farm” animal welfare: potential EU added value from the introduction of animal welfare labelling requirements at EU level’,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 June 2021 on the European Citizens’ Initiative ‘End the Cage Age’ (2021/2633 (RSP)),
- having regard to the fitness check currently being carried out by the Commission on EU animal-welfare legislation,
- having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure, as well as Article 1(1)(e) of, and Annex 3 to, the decision of the Conference of Presidents of 12 December 2002 on the procedure for granting authorisation to draw up own-initiative reports,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A9-0000/2021),

¹ OJ L 221, 8.8.1998, p. 23-27.

² OJ L 203, 3.8.1999, p. 53-57.

³ OJ L 182, 12.7.2007, p. 19-28.

⁴ OJ L 10, 15.1.2009, p. 7-13.

⁵ OJ L 47, 18.2.2009, p. 5-13.

- A. whereas animal welfare is a sensitive and increasingly important issue in our society;
- B. whereas European food-production standards, including animal welfare criteria, are the highest and most rigorous in the world;
- C. whereas more uniform application of existing animal welfare legislation is a prerequisite to raising these standards;
- D. whereas European farmers have made steady progress in recent decades by looking critically at their practices and making improvements and adjustments in their work; whereas they rely on the support of advisory and research bodies and a number of non-governmental organisations to improve their practices; whereas, what is more, European farmers want to continue to move forward in this area but face technical and economic obstacles;
- E. whereas animal welfare goes hand in hand with farmers' welfare and both should be given appropriate resources;
- F. whereas scientific and technical developments have improved our understanding of animal sentience and welfare;
- G. whereas significant difficulties were encountered in the collection of data on the implementation of on-farm animal welfare legislation as regards both the quality and the availability of data;
- H. whereas the current legislation is partly obsolete and lags behind the scientific advances and technical progress made in farming practices;
- I. whereas the current EU legislation, which provides a combination of opt-outs, exceptions and unclear requirements and fails to provide specific safeguards, co-exists with national laws, all of which are considered to have distorted competition;
- J. whereas animal welfare legislation does not cover all species farmed for food;
- K. whereas initiatives other than EU legislation and official checks have played a part in the continuous improvement of farming practices;
- L. whereas the Member States have been given considerable discretion over how to set requirements and assess compliance with them; whereas the Member States have taken different approaches to the allocation of resources and prioritisation of official checks;
- M. whereas the directives on pigs (for pregnant sows), calves and laying hens have led to positive structural changes to the way in which animals are reared; whereas in the egg, veal and pigmeat sectors, the directives have led to significant changes to buildings and equipment and played a part in some advances in the number and size of holdings;
- N. whereas the laying hens directive has been a success; whereas this success is limited, however, given the broad range of approaches applied by the Member States to its implementation, which has distorted competition in the single market;
- O. whereas working conditions have improved for laying-hen and veal farmers but not

necessarily for pig farmers;

- P. whereas a distinction should be drawn between anecdotal cases of non-compliance, which are the focus of too much attention, and the vast majority of farmers who follow the rules;
- Q. whereas livestock farming methods vary among the Member States;
- R. whereas our agricultural, environmental and commercial strategies should be coherent;
- S. whereas the common agricultural policy (CAP) is one of the regulatory tools that can be used to improve the welfare of farm animals;
- T. whereas particular attention should be paid to ensuring that our political decisions do not weaken the European livestock-production sector, which would lead to the relocation of production to other parts of the world where livestock conditions and standards are lower than in Europe, and to other, connected problems;
- U. whereas labelling can only be effective if it is easy for consumers to understand, designed for an integrated single market and underpinned by a coherent EU trade policy;
- V. whereas information tools for consumers should be designed in such a way as to maintain a level playing field, which is currently hampered by the welter of private initiatives;
- W. whereas the aim in legislative action on labelling should be to harmonise regulations and standards;

Conclusions and recommendations

Implementing the rules

1. Acknowledges the great strides made by livestock farmers on their farms, particularly in improving animal welfare, and their drive and commitment to forward thinking and progress;
2. Recommends giving all livestock farmers the means, via an EU-level framework, to take part in a process of progress, based on objective indicators referring to the five fundamental freedoms defined by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE);
3. Calls for any future legislative initiative (whether the establishment of new legislation or a review of existing texts) entailing an amendment or change to the livestock-raising system (including accommodation) to be based on sound, recent scientific data derived from research grounded in a systemic approach and not focused on any single aspect of sustainability; advocates for balance to be maintained and for scientific advice on how the desired changes will affect the animals, the environment and the farmers to be followed;
4. Calls on the Commission to update animal welfare rules in the light of scientific progress in this field;

5. Recalls that changes must be made after scientific evaluation and with a view to meeting citizens' needs, with due account for consumers' choices and purchasing power;
6. Urges lawmakers to familiarise themselves with and be fully aware of the consequences of these developments; calls for changes to be assessed using a holistic approach taking in the social, environmental and economic components of sustainability, as well as ergonomics for farmers and health-related aspects; recalls that animal welfare must be coupled with an economic approach if it is to prove successful in the long run;
7. Stresses that any change must be considered in the light of the time needed for livestock farmers to implement it and the inertia it may entail;
8. Warns that any potential changes to cages will need to be accompanied by precise and unambiguous definitions of what constitutes a cage;
9. Recalls that investments in improved animal welfare incur higher production costs, no matter the type of livestock farming concerned; notes that, unless covered by financial aid or a return on investment from the market, the rise in production costs means that farmers will not be able to invest in animal welfare;
10. Calls for financial support to be provided to livestock farmers who must effect a transition on their farms, whether by means of public policies (a coherent combination of different tools, including the CAP) or the market, and for consumers to be provided with clear and transparent information by ensuring clear and reliable labelling of animal products on welfare-related aspects of their production; calls, further, for a positive and non-stigmatising communications strategy to be implemented;
11. Invites the Commission to communicate more effectively on virtuous practices and to assist the livestock sector in its efforts to make progress, by supporting the means of implementation, thus respecting the efforts of all stakeholders to get their initiatives off the ground and adopting an encouraging stance;
12. Proposes enhancing training for farmers and operators in the sector handling animals by adding a specific module for initial and ongoing training with a view to honing skills;
13. Points out that practices intended to improve animal well-being usually incur higher production costs and increase farmers' workload, and that this must be offset by corresponding remuneration; stresses, by way of example, that phasing in loose housing for pregnant sows would require a 30-year transition period to ensure that the additional costs incurred are recouped from the market, and that the least onerous way of introducing this is to construct new buildings, something that can only be done with the cooperation of the authorities in issuing building permits;
14. Stresses that some measures believed to improve animal welfare are in fact counterproductive and may undermine other aspects of sustainability, namely welfare and health safety-related issues, as well as efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; cites, by way of example, that keeping rabbits in the open air increases stress and mortality levels, and that installing collective cages in rabbitries leads to aggressive behaviour among does, causing stress, injury and reduced performance;

15. Notes the multifaceted complexity of the central, thorny welfare problem in pig farming, namely tail biting; observes that the technical difficulty encountered in the extensive research into and analysis of risk factors throughout the EU has meant that no reliable solutions whatsoever have been found;
16. Stresses the need for amendments to the veterinary rules covering pig farms to take account of progress in the field of piglet castration;
17. Invites the Commission to ensure the availability in the various Member States of a harmonised EU list of the available products and protocols for the use of pain-killers and anaesthesia for piglet castration; asks the Commission to permit the short-term storage of medicines on farms and to allow veterinarians to leave them there;
18. Applauds the Commission for publishing, on 12 May 2021, strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture, which pay particular attention to animal welfare, and welcomes the fact that Parliament's Committee on Fisheries is drafting an own-initiative report on these guidelines;
19. Invites the Commission to improve the internal market by devising a harmonised, shared strategy on animal welfare in European countries;
20. Urges the Commission to inform consumers and raise their awareness of the reality of livestock farming and the diversity and origin of production methods by showing, without dogmatism, the care and attention that farmers pay to their animals;
21. Calls on the Commission to reword its regulatory framework to make it clearer, with a view not to tightening rules up but rather to making the objectives and indicators more easily comprehensible and, thereby, to leaving less room for interpretation and enabling uniform national transposition among Member States; suggests updating the general directive to include the Commission's objectives and expectations regarding the welfare of farm animals and working on species-specific directives, with due account for the nature of livestock farming, the various stages of the animals' lives, on-farm practices unrelated to livestock farming, and the diversity of soil and weather conditions;
22. Invites the Commission to clarify its framework for monitoring Member States and punishing them for any non-compliance;
23. Asks the Commission to accompany any decision with a scientific and economic impact assessment (including a market study) taking into account the diversity of farming methods in each sector in the European Union and analysing the situation from both the animal's (species by species and at different stages of production) and the farmer's perspective;
24. Calls on the Commission to improve cooperation between all the stakeholders concerned and to facilitate dialogue between the various stakeholders in the Member States so as to enable joint consideration of developments in livestock-farming systems; encourages the sharing of 'good' practices between livestock-farming sectors and countries; wishes to see the development of tools to encourage pioneering livestock farmers to participate in development projects; asks for livestock farmers to be involved at all stages of the studies carried out in Europe's various regions; wishes to see the

study documents and documents for disseminating good practice translated into all the languages of the European Union;

25. Urges the Commission to link its various strategies by implementing rules drawn up in a manner consistent with the European Green Deal, the ‘Farm to Fork’ strategy and agricultural, trade and promotion policies;
26. Calls on the Commission to join up the various legal texts on animal welfare, whether on farms, during transport or at slaughter;

Labelling

27. Deplores the lack of a return on investment for farmers who take part in voluntary animal welfare recognition schemes; notes, further, that animal welfare labelling will only prove successful if a return on investment is forthcoming from the higher price point;
28. Stresses that the introduction of animal welfare labelling requires, at an early stage, harmonised rules drawn up in collaboration with farmers and based on clear scientific indicators; calls for consideration to be given to an EU framework for voluntary labelling covering all livestock farms, so as to limit the risks of distorting competition in the internal market while leaving sufficient room for private initiatives;
29. Asks the Commission to propose an EU framework for voluntary animal welfare labelling which is linked to EU rules – which must be its basis – and which invites the Member States to record the various approaches used; calls for its specifications to be drawn up according to a technically realistic approach and for this EU framework to ensure that value is redistributed towards livestock farmers;
30. Invites the Commission to conduct an in-depth examination of the possible implications of introducing mandatory labelling requirements at EU level, drawing in particular on experience gained in recent public labelling schemes in some Member States;
31. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.