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EU Launches Animal Welfare Strategy 2012-2015

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Report Highlights:

On January 19, 2012, a Communication from the Commission announced the new EU Animal Welfare Strategy for 2012-2015. This new animal welfare strategy succeeds the Community Action Plan on the protection and welfare of animals (2006-2010). The aim of this new strategy is to improve the implementation and enforcement of existing animal welfare legislation, which has less than ideal. A case in point is the poor implementation of the 2012 ban of conventional cages for laying hens. Further, the new strategy aims to broaden the scope of EU animal welfare standards, both domestically and in the international arena.

General Information:

On January 19, 2012, a “[Communication from the Commission](#)” [1] announced the EU Animal Welfare Strategy for 2012 – 2015. This new strategy is a continuation of the “[Community Action Plan on the protection and welfare of animals \(2006-2010\)](#).” [2] This new animal welfare (AW) strategy hinges on four principles:

1 The use of scientific outcome-based AW indicators.

Such indicators are expected to be scientifically validated through research like the [Welfare Quality®](#) [3] project. After a risk assessment, the indicators will be incorporated into existing AW legislation, thereby allowing more flexibility to improve competitiveness of livestock producers. This will also allow the indicators to be more easily recognized internationally by bodies such as the OIE.

2 A new EU framework will increase transparency.

Under the new framework, consumers will have a better guarantee that AW claims are transparent and scientifically relevant. An EU label on AW is suggested that would carry information about farm production standards of covered products.

3 The establishment of a European network of reference centers.

Mirroring the network of reference centers for animal health, these centers will provide technical support to the operations for AW indicators. These reference centers may also coordinate and disseminate information on research and innovations through training courses for operators.

4 Common requirements for competence of personnel handling animals.

Prescribed mandatory training will help improve operators’ knowledge of legal obligations and their ability to identify, prevent and/or limit animals’ pain, suffering and distress. Such training will also contribute to improving the harmonized application of existing requirements, as well as increasing harmonization of processes, facilities and equipment for handling animals.

Implementing these four principles in the EU Animal Welfare Strategy for 2012 – 2015, the EU seeks to strengthen the influence of its AW policy in the following areas:

- **Member States' compliance**—through better guidelines and implementing tools, like the creation of working groups on enforcement and more stringent infringement proceedings;
- **International cooperation**—by actively incorporating AW into all EU bilateral, regional and multilateral policies and agreements;
- **Consumer and public awareness**—by providing appropriate educational information on AW;
- **Animal welfare link to the Common Agriculture Policy**—by including AW conditions on Pillar 1 support through the “cross compliance” and including AW in the rural development programs under Pillar 2;
- **Farmed fish**—by reviewing the welfare of farmed fish.

A list of actions for the coming years under this new strategy is included below. Further information on the new AW strategy and related events are available on a dedicated [EU webpage](#) [4] .

Actions foreseen	Year
Series of enforcement actions on the protection of laying hens (Directive 1999/74/EC)	2012
Implementing plan and enforcement actions on the grouping of sows (Directive 2008/120/EC)	2012
Implementing plan for the slaughter regulation (Council Regulation (EC) N° 1099/2009)	2012
EU implementing rules or guidelines on the protection of animals during transport	2012
Report to the European Parliament and the Council on the impact of genetic selection on the welfare of chickens bred and kept for meat production*	2012
Report to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of the Regulation (EC) No 1523/2007 banning the placing on the market of cat and dog fur*	2012
Study on the welfare of farmed fish at the time of killing	2013
Report to the European Parliament and the Council on the various stunning methods for poultry *	2013
Report to the Council on the implementation of Directive 98/58/EC*	2013
EU guidelines on the protection of pigs	2013
Study on animal welfare education and on information activities directed at the general public and consumers	2013
Study on the opportunity to provide consumers with the relevant information on the stunning of animals*	2013
Possible legislative proposal for a simplified EU legislative framework for animal welfare	2014
Report on the impact of animal welfare international activities on the competitiveness of European livestock producers in a globalised world	2014
Report to the European Parliament and the Council on system restraining bovine animals by inversion or any unnatural position *	2014
Study on the welfare of dogs and cats involved in commercial practices	2014
EU guidelines or implementing rules on the protection of animals at the time of killing	2014
Report to the European Parliament and the Council on the possibility of introducing certain requirements regarding the protection of fish at the time of killing*	2015
Report to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of Directive 2007/43/EC and its influence on the welfare of chickens bred and kept for meat production*	2015
Study on the welfare of farmed fish during transport	2015

* Obligations deriving from EU legislation

Background and Preparatory Actions

At the final stage of the [Community Action Plan on the protection and welfare of animals \(2006-2010\)](#), the EU ordered an evaluation in preparation of its next multi-annual plan. This “[Evaluation of the EU policy on animal welfare](#)” [5] (EUPAW), which was released in December 2010, identified the following problem areas:

1 Lack of enforcement of EU legislation by the Member States.

A most striking example of this is the implementation of the ban on conventional cages for layer hens, where 13 out of 27 Member States (MS) have failed to meet the January 1, 2012 deadline despite a twelve-year lag in implementation. A similar failure is expected for the sow stall ban which comes into

effect on January 1, 2013.

2 Failure to provide consumers with appropriate information on animal welfare.

The EU has not done enough to educate consumers about the value of AW and the inherent costs. Consequently, consumers have failed to appreciate the price differential between animal-welfare-friendly and conventional production. This has led to prevailing price structures that do not fully account for the added costs.

3 Many stakeholders lack adequate knowledge of animal welfare.

Large sections of the EU food chain (farmers to retailers) have not adopted AW requirements into their production or that of their suppliers.

4 A need to simplify and develop clear principles for animal welfare.

Many see the aforementioned shortcomings as direct results of an overly-prescriptive AW legislation that is proving too costly and too difficult to implement.

In preparation for its new AW strategy, the EU launched several activities, including an international conference and a survey that was reported in GAIN report, [New Animal Welfare Strategy 2011-2015 Brussels USEU EU-27 12-17-2010](#) [6]. Under the auspices of its Rapporteur Marit Paulsen, the European Parliament (EP) issued its own [evaluation report](#) [7] on the Action plan 2006-2010. In her report, MEP Paulsen urged the EU to vigorously promote AW as a non-trade concern in the WTO. The report also recommended that the EU develop a general AW law, which would apply to all livestock and animals in captivity, such as pets, strays, and zoo and circus animals.

Comment

In a reaction to the Commission EU Animal Welfare Strategy 2012-2015 document, the European Parliament (EP) Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) published an own initiative [Opinion](#) [8], sponsored by Dutch MEP Kartika Liotard, suggesting that the new EU strategy include additional AW aspects. In Article 9, the Opinion specifically requests the inclusion of additional legislative proposals, of which the most important are:

- Revision of Regulation 1/2005, including a proposal to limit the duration of transport of farmed animals to 8 hours supported by a petition with over 1 100 000 signatories;
- A legislative proposal introducing a ban on cloning and on the placing on the market of products from clones and their offspring;
- A legislative proposal introducing a ban on the genetic modification of animals and on the placing on the market of products from genetically modified animals and their offspring.

However, the EP Committee on Agriculture (AGRI) did not include these suggestions from the ENVI Committee in its own Report, which was adopted on June 19, 2012.

Impact on U.S. Agricultural Exports

While the EU Animal Welfare Strategy 2012-2015 is not expected to have direct impact on U.S. agricultural exports, the threat remains from EU animal producers who insist on a “level playing field”

against imports, which will likely lead to an EC imposition of AW labeling requirements. If the EP plenary decides to adopt the opinion of the ENVI Committee despite a lack of support from the AGRI Committee, it could lead to an important extension of the coverage of the AW strategy, banning products of animal cloning or genetically modified animals from the EU market. An even greater threat comes from the EU exporting its AW philosophy and standards to the international arena, at all levels. As an example of the EU's successful efforts in this area, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) organized its "1st FAO Global Multi-stakeholder Forum on Animal Welfare" in Brussels on March 1-2, 2012, on the heels of an EU conference on its new AW strategy. More directly, it has become EU policy to systematically include an AW component in all Free Trade Agreements (FTA) and Veterinary Equivalency Agreements (VEA) that it concludes with other countries on trade in agricultural products.

Earlier reports from FAS/USEU on EU animal welfare policies are listed below.

	Related reports from FAS EU	
E60074	EU reviews Regulation on Animal Welfare during transportation	12/16/2011
E60042	Implementation of Animal Welfare Directives in the EU	07/14/2011
E57009	New Animal Welfare Strategy, 2011-2015	12/17/2010
E49084	Animal Welfare Labeling	11/19/2009
E49028	EC engages on Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare	03/24/2009

These reports can be accessed through the FAS website <http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Pages/Default.aspx>

- [1] http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/actionplan/docs/aw_strategy_19012012_en.pdf
- [2] http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/work_doc_strategic_basis230106_en.pdf
- [3] <http://www.welfarequality.net/everyone/26536/5/0/22>
- [4] http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/actionplan/actionplan_en.htm
- [5] <http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/actionplan/3%20Final%20Report%20-%20EUPAW%20Evaluation.pdf>
- [6] http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/New%20Animal%20Welfare%20Strategy%202011-2015_Brussels%20USEU_EU-27_12-17-2010.pdf
- [7] http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/actionplan/100521_report_0052_2010_en.pdf
- [8] <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fNONSGML%2bCOMPARL%2bPE-486.180%2b03%2bDOC%2bPDF%2bV0%2f%2fEN>