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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE  
COUNCIL, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE  
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Options for animal welfare labelling and the establishment of a European Network of  
Reference Centres for the protection and welfare of animals**

**SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT**

## BACKGROUND

In 2006, the Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006 – 2010 was adopted. This plan highlights the importance of consumer information as part of a comprehensive communication strategy on animal welfare and the planned establishment of a European centre for animal welfare.

Three Eurobarometer surveys were carried out in 2005 and 2006 on animal welfare. The results showed that there is strong public support for the idea of a label or logo of some type to give information on animal welfare in food production.

In December 2006, DG SANCO published a **summary of the results for the consultation** 'Labelling: competitiveness, consumer information and better regulation for the EU'<sup>1</sup>, which also covered animal welfare labelling. The vast majority of contributors consider information on the animal welfare conditions under which food is produced to be relevant for consumers and a potential marketing opportunity for producers and retailers.

In May 2007, the Council of Ministers adopted conclusions on animal welfare labelling<sup>2</sup>, inviting the Commission to present a report on this issue in order to allow an in-depth debate.

Following on from the Action Plan and the surveys, DG SANCO has started to explore various legislative and non-legislative options for animal welfare labelling and for a network of reference centres for animal welfare in order to further the debate. However, neither initiative is intended to raise animal welfare standards as such. The aim of the labelling initiative is to increase consumer understanding of animal welfare, among other options, by the information provided on the labels, and the proposal for reference centres is intended to harmonise accepted animal welfare standards and to promote the sharing and use of best practice in animal welfare systems. To help prepare its report, DG SANCO commissioned a study to assess the feasibility of different options for indicating animal welfare-related information on products of animal origin and for establishing a Community Reference Centre for Animal Protection and Welfare. This study was conducted by **Civic Consulting** (lead), with some input from **Agra CEAS Consulting**, of the Food Chain Evaluation Consortium (FCEC).

The study concluded that a key issue for consumers where animal welfare is concerned was the lack of information on food products regarding animal welfare standards. In the course of the study, the consultants found various reasons for the lack of information on the market, including:

- the absence of a harmonised system of animal welfare standards for labelling purposes;
- the difficulty in communicating to the consumer in a clear way the difference in animal welfare standards across food products; and

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/betterregulation/competitiveness\\_consumer\\_info.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/betterregulation/competitiveness_consumer_info.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/agricult/93986.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/agricult/93986.pdf)

- the evolution of different animal welfare labelling schemes across Europe, creating differentiation between goods and a non-levelled playing field for operators.

Taking into account the findings from the comprehensive stakeholder consultation carried out during the external feasibility study, the Commission explores policy options in the report to address the current lack of consumer information and inequities in the Single Market, including the possibilities for a voluntary/mandatory animal welfare labelling scheme and the establishment of a European Network of Reference Centres to share best practice on animal welfare. At this stage, the report does not outline any commitments already agreed for action, but simply examines various options that could be used to address the objectives of the Action Plan.

The Impact Assessment provides analysis to support the development of strategic orientations on how to better communicate in the field of animal welfare and the establishment of a network of references centres for animal welfare, as set out in the report. The report, scheduled for autumn 2009, will not contain definitive legislative proposals — these will be put forward if needed, and be accompanied by their own specific impact assessments.

Given the different impacts of the areas covered in the report, the impact assessment has been divided into two parts — the first concentrating on the impacts of different options for improving the communication to consumers on animal welfare related to livestock products and the second exploring the impacts of establishing a Network of Reference Centres.

## **PART I: ANIMAL WELFARE LABELLING**

DG SANCO is exploring the possibility of establishing a system of animal welfare labelling to improve consumer information on welfare standards and existing welfare schemes and to harmonise the internal market to prevent widely differing welfare standards being used under the generic ‘welfare’ term. This initiative does not aim to raise the minimum standards laid down in Community legislation or to improve compliance with existing legislative requirements.

This impact assessment has focused on the options outlined in the report for animal welfare labelling to give an idea of the likely impacts on stakeholders of each option. Given the early stage of policy development, the impact analysis remains mainly qualitative, but, where possible, quantitative estimates of the potential impact are provided.

For mandatory labelling, several options are considered:

- mandatory labelling of the welfare standards under which products of animal origin are produced,
- mandatory labelling of the farming system under which products of animal origin are produced, and
- mandatory labelling of compliance with EU minimum standards or equivalents.

The impact assessment also considers voluntary options, including:

- establishment of requirements for voluntary use of animal welfare claims;

- establishment of a voluntary Community Animal Welfare Label open for all to use if they meet the criteria;
- drafting of guidelines for animal welfare labelling and quality schemes.

Although this impact assessment does not conclude on any definitive option for animal welfare labelling, it does identify the legislative and non-legislative options that are considered the most feasible at this stage (harmonised requirements for voluntary animal welfare claims and/or a Community animal welfare label). It is hoped that the report and Impact Assessment in combination will help facilitate an in-depth inter-institutional debate on the subject to consider if further EU action is necessary.

## **PART II: EUROPEAN NETWORK OF REFERENCE CENTRES FOR THE PROTECTION AND WELFARE OF ANIMALS**

The objective of the second part of the impact assessment is to explore and assess the feasibility of different options for establishing a European Network of Reference Centres for the Protection and Welfare of Animals (ENRC).

The options to develop a central community reference centre were considered in the light of the concerns raised in the consultation on:

- the lack of harmonised animal welfare standards/indicators for higher animal welfare;
- the lack of coordination of existing resources to share best practices;
- the need for an independent source of information at EU level; and
- the duplication of activities due to a lack of coordination at EU level.

Taking this into account, the Commission is discussing options that it hopes will achieve greater coordination of existing resources while identifying future needs, and will ensure a more consistent and coordinated approach to animal protection and welfare across Commission policy areas.

The main policy options discussed in the impact assessment are:

- continuation of the current situation (status quo option),
- various different options for a centralised approach,
- various options for a decentralised approach, and
- a task-specific strategy to determine central and decentral elements.

While the impact assessment does not identify a preferred option at this stage, it does conclude that if EU action were to be taken in this area some form of mixed approach based on decentralised and centralised elements would be the most feasible.

## **ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE FUTURE PROPOSALS**

This is the first step in assessing the impacts of the different policy options; any firm policy decisions that may be taken as a result of this debate will be conditional on further impact assessments to evaluate their budgetary feasibility and to better assess their costs. Evidence will be obtained on consumer demands for animal welfare information, the distortion of competition due to the lack of a harmonised Community framework to establish criteria for animal welfare labelling, and the market opportunities for producers that would like to apply higher animal welfare standards than required by Community legislation.

The assessment of any future proposal for a labelling scheme will be based on the following criteria:

- extent to which the different policy options would allow a labelling system to be developed based on a sound scientific basis and benchmarks to assess the level of animal welfare,
- extent to which the different policy options would allow for inspection/audit and certification by independent certification bodies,
- extent to which the different policy options would avoid distortions of competition,
- extent to which the different policy options constitute a reliable, user-friendly and transparent tool to communicate the standard of welfare and enable consumers to make informed choices, and
- compatibility with international obligations towards third-country trading partners.

Regarding the options for the establishment of an ENRC, the assessment will be based on the following principles:

- the ENRC should complement, not duplicate, current activities by other Community bodies,
- all areas of animal use should be covered, and
- the Centre should be independent from outside interests.

The impacts expected to be the most significant are social and economic impacts such as the impacts on consumer information, distortion of competition, consumer prices, costs for producers, existing schemes, intra-EU trade and external trade. Impacts on administrative burden, SMEs and the environment, and the impact of introducing welfare criteria in existing or future product quality labelling schemes, such as organic farming, will be duly taken into account.

These impacts will be assessed using the results of the Welfare Quality project and an external study to carry out a further analysis of the possible social, economic and environmental impacts. Further consumer research (Eurobarometer) will also be undertaken to determine if consumer opinions stated in previous surveys (willingness to pay, etc.) remain valid or whether different factors are now influencing consumers' purchasing patterns.