

# Meeting of the sub-group on animal welfare labelling

Eighth meeting, 25 January 2022  
(Videoconference)

## – MINUTES –

### Attendance

<b>Independent expert</b>	Jarkko Niemi
	Eurogroup for animals
<b>Civil society organisations</b>	FOUR PAWS
	COPA
<b>Business and professional organisations</b>	EMN
	ERPA
	FVE
<b>Member States</b>	Denmark
	Germany
	Spain
<b>European Commission</b>	SANTE G5 (Chair)
<b>Guests</b>	EUROCOMMERCE (three people)

### Discussions

#### 1. EUROCOMMERCE views on animal welfare labelling (3 presentations)

EUROCOMMERCE presented different angles of their approach on animal welfare labelling.

**A first presentation** gave an overall view of the retail and wholesale sector on animal welfare labelling. The presentation referred to studies on the state of the retailing sector indicating a widening polarization of the market. There is, on one hand, a group of consumers focusing on low prices and on the other hand, another part focusing on more healthy, local, and environmentally friendly products. EUROCOMMERCE suggested to develop a voluntary EU scheme that covers all species and all stages of production for benchmarking existing schemes rather than replacing them.

Q&A on the first presentation:

One member asked if they had data before the COVID crisis. Another member wanted to know if they had specific data on animal welfare consumption. A member asked how retailers were

addressing the paradox of polarization. The Chair asked if they had data on polarization of consumption by regions of Europe.

EUROCOMMERCE promised to check if such data were available and could be communicated to the group. Regarding polarization, they said that retailers were taking different approaches. Some of them look for economy of scale but increase in prices are mostly under the control of suppliers.

One member stated that producers were very concerned by the difficulties to get reward from their efforts in improving standards. This member said that producers mostly depend on the retailers' strategy and consumers do not have a real choice. This member concluded that it was very difficult for producers to improve standards if they did not get any increase in their revenues. Another member wanted to know what makes a particular label successful compared to another one, what are the parameters that matters. Another member raised the issue of the use of antibiotics.

EUROCOMMERCE declared that price differential can only be limited because beyond a certain level (e.g., 5%), consumers are less likely to change their purchasing behaviour. Regarding criteria that matters, it is difficult to point out specific areas because it varies across sectors and countries. They also said that it was important to educate consumers through various means so that consumers can understand the difference between products if they are interested to know. As regards antibiotics, they have no specific policy at sector level, apart of being compliant. Some retailers have specifically included responsible use of antibiotics in their sustainability initiatives.

**A second presentation** focused on the German retailers' experience on animal welfare labelling (Initiative Tier Wohl - ITW / Haltungsform HTF) that benchmarks existing schemes. The initiative covers 90% of poultry meat in Germany and 50% of pig meat. Retailers invested around EUR 650 million into a fund enabling the financing of higher standards at farm level, the logo itself not being enough to change practices.

#### Q&A on the second presentation:

One member asked how HTF was working with imported products. The same member wanted to know how they envisage the connection between the German scheme and a future sustainable EU label. The same member also wondered if there were studies regarding the risk of confusion between the labels themselves and the HTF marking. Another member wanted to know how the funding could possibly work within an EU context.

EUROCOMMERCE reminded that HTF is open to imported products. In an EU context, if such approach was taken, it would need to also establish criteria for them. Concerning sustainability label, they recognised that there will be serious challenges due to conflicting objectives between some welfare aspects and environmental ones. However, whatever solutions chosen, there is a need to reduce the number of labels and favour benchmarks rather than quality labels. The proliferation of labels is also a problem in terms of space on the package of the product. As regards funding, they think that it is a sensitive issue that should remain at national level. It does not stop for the Commission to find a way to encourage Member States in assisting farmers for that.

A member asked if the funding of HTF will continue.

EUROCOMMERCE replied that the decision will depend on how the situation evolves in Germany with the governmental proposal for an animal welfare label. It will be crucial to ensure that both labels do not contradict themselves and have the possibility to coexist. In any case, the operators

involved in HTF aim to progressively continue the move to a more market driven approach, where funding to promote higher standards, will ideally be provided through price premium supported by consumers alone.

A member asked if there was any reflection in HTF on the use of animal-based indicators rather than a system purely based on resources-based indicators. Another member stated that HTF only applies for retailers' brands which means that several products are not part of it. The same member considered that the German State label scheme will make HTF redundant. Another member considered that the benchmark alone does not solve the problem of consumers where no animal welfare label exists.

EUROCOMMERCE confirmed that HTF was a resource-based system of assessment. In addition, transport and breeding practices are presently not included but discussions are ongoing. They admitted that discussions on these topics are difficult.

One member however specified that the German State label does not forbid the use of other schemes as long as they are not misleading for consumers.

**A third presentation** gave an overview of the good practices developed in Portugal in this respect.

#### Q&A general for EUROCOMMERCE:

Then, there was a more general discussion regarding the perspective of a future EU label.

One member reiterated the questions related to the criteria and the price differential to change consumers behaviour.

EUROCOMMERCE replied that information and education of consumers only work if consumers are interested. The difficulty of an EU label is that both from suppliers and consumers sides the situation considerably varies across countries and sectors. One single label without taking into account the challenges at producer level would not easily meet all expectations. Therefore, they believe that the EU should propose a framework for benchmarking current schemes rather than proposing a single and narrow solution.

Another member raised the issue of added value for producers and ask if there was any hard data on how the value is transmitted in the food supply chain.

EUROCOMMERCE said that they are working with producers and a legal framework would be helpful, especially to ensure a stability in the long term for producers. The question of added value is delicate to collect because it touches to the competitiveness of each operator. They considered that consumers have limited interest in specific criteria and need more a general awareness and indication on how their overall concern on animal welfare is addressed rather than technical information.

## **2. Summary of the work of the subgroup (presentation)**

The Chair summarized the work done by the subgroup during the seven preceding meetings and the main conclusions drawn from them. The Chair concluded that the inputs of the subgroup have been extremely useful to shape the Commission reflections on this topic.

He confirmed that this was the last meeting of the group and thanked all participants for their competence and constructive contributions.