

Subgroup on Animal Welfare labelling

– MINUTES –

Fourth meeting

Tuesday, 9 February 2021, 09.30 – 12.30 CET, Brussels time

Attendance

Independent expert	Jarkko Niemi (JN)
Civil society organisations	Inês Grenho Ajuda (IGA) Alexandra Joos (AJ)
Business and professional organisations	Marcin Sokołowski (MS) Miguel Angel Higuera (MAH) Marie Guyot (MG) Trine Vig Tamstorf (TVT)
Member States	Christina M. Nygaard (CN) Léon Arnts (LA) Maria Teresa Villalba (MTV)
European Commission	Chair Denis Simonin (DS) Lucie Carrouee Aude Luyckx Sandra Sanmartin Margot Kuzma Françoise Divanach Celia Burgaz

1. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the 3rd meeting held on 13 January 2021, were not approved because Mr Arnts suggested changes the day before the meeting. Another version will be circulated by email and approval will be done by email.

The agenda was adopted. However, Ms. Villalba mentioned that she was contacted by a contractor doing a study on animal welfare labelling. The chair explained that this study is mandated by the European Parliament independently from the European Commission's work. The European Commission on its side will also launch a study on animal welfare labelling that should start in April. This might be a source of confusion among stakeholders. The two studies are however done separately. The study mandated by the European Parliament should be completed in July while the Commission's study is planned to be completed in December.

2. Case study 2: "Compromiso Bienestar" an example from the meat industry in Spain by Miguel Higuera

The presenter explained the certified scheme system for animal welfare for the meat sector used in Spain. Based on the support and cooperation of all stakeholders of the food chain, the certified scheme was designed in 2018. Six organisations are owners of the system which concerns six species. The fundamental principle of the system is to give assurance from farmers until the packaged product. This is guaranteed by the quality assurance systems implemented at each step in the chain. For the pig production, the scope of the system concerns the whole chain, from gestation and breeding to production, slaughter and retail. An independent committee of scientific experts is in charge of the technical rules. Different national associations are members of this committee, mainly universities and agencies specialized in pig production. In addition, NGOs are part of an advisory committee. The system is based on the assessment of 9 areas with a total of 33 criteria/subareas and not only the 12 Welfare Quality criteria. While there are similarities with the Welfare Quality assessment system,

the scheme has tried to change them into more objective measures. The label is organized in three levels, the first one containing requirements on the level of the legislation. 71 operators are already certified, including farmers, industries and slaughterhouses, representing around 40% of the pig Spanish production. The labelling is being prepared for other species: beef, lam, hens and rabbits.

3. Questions and Answers on case study 2

Questions and considerations were raised during the discussion which followed the presentation. Answering the questions and suggestions, the presenter touched upon the following main aspects:

- The animal welfare logo clearly specifies the type of certification. This new label is related to a QR system to inform consumers on what each of the three codes used stands for. Given that a wide variety of colours used to identify the different levels can lead to misunderstanding for consumers, the system used has only one colour for pigs, only one label and has a QR-code system incorporated to give further information.
- The scientific committee was settled inviting national stakeholders working in the field of animal welfare from diverse backgrounds, mainly veterinarians and agricultural engineers, with the aim to achieve an objective point of view for all the indicators and to provide proper, accurate and complete training for the auditors.
- Retailers would like to focus on 1 or 2 different levels maximum, due to the lack of space in their shelves and in order to avoid possible confusions among consumers
- The scoring of the labelling on indicators is not used to benchmark the farmers. The protocols used and the scoring system are useful to the farm at individual level to improve the management before the next year's audit.
- The main challenge is to make sure that this certification system is objective.
- Regular meetings organised every four months with NGOs are useful to receive feedbacks and proposals, and they are part of the advisory committee.
- The traceability has to be in all the products: if you do not have all the steps, you cannot have the label in the final product. Usually, farmers use the certification because the slaughterhouse demands it. There is a huge interest for the industry on animal welfare requirements.
- All the species are together under the same certification umbrella. However, each of the species has specific characteristics.
- With regard to the legal framework, the existing legislation covers only a 20 or 25% of all the requirements that need to be analysed in the farms (therefore of the total scoring of the type 1). All the indicators that are not included in the legislation need to be controlled, too. However, without compliance with the minimum included on the legislation, it is not possible to achieve the certification for the farm.
- Farmers under certification don't receive a higher price for their pigs. Participating is a strategic choice, they can show that they work in a proper way.

The chair thanked the speaker for the excellent presentation.

4. Case study 3: Consumers' approach to animal welfare labelling by Jarkko Niemi

The presenter focused on the consumers' perceptions on animal welfare labelling. The core concepts around farm animal welfare are Naturalness and Human treatment. However, in addition to health, housing and post-farm aspects, the psychological aspects of welfare are also relevant to consumers. There is a perceived risk related to antibiotic usage and food safety. The presenter illustrated the profile of the more concerned consumers, and compared it to consumers who show a lower level of concern and explained that emotional and epistemic strategies increase consumer value perceptions.

In addition, consumers are often overwhelmed by the amount of information that is communicated to them. Messages should be simple and understandable to anyone. Credibility is important, it matters who is providing the information (third-party certification). A strong communication campaign is needed before the consumers are able to identify a product. In the ClearFarm project's focus group, consumers expressed their wishes and concerns. Labels are considered as the key vehicle to communicate about farm animal welfare with consumers. The public and other stakeholders prefer preventative approaches to control animal health and welfare.

5. Questions and Answers on case study 2

Many questions and considerations were raised during the discussion which followed the presentation. Answering the questions, the presenter touched upon the following main aspects:

- All the studies are carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic. There has been some research on the impact of COVID-19 on food consumption. Food safety has become more important and the concern on animal welfare from consumers may have probably increased.
- Enhanced animal welfare needs incentives for action, and consumers need to have higher standards to be willing to pay more for the products. The label should be transparent and simple. The idea of protected terms seems interesting and in line with other EU labels. That might clarify communication to the consumers.
- There are some gender and age differences that can determine the different interests of consumers and the strategies.
- There is a relationship between the willingness to pay and the expenditures of the household (on food), showing consumers' preferences and views of the world and determining the social references group. It could be a good proxy to evaluate the willingness to pay, shaped by different countries¹.
- The consumers' behaviour also depends on how the retailers design the shopping environments, and there are some studies identifying this.
- There are some studies on mobile apps for consumers on animal welfare and sustainability. In the context of the ClearFarm project, results have not been published yet and need to be completely analysed, but initial results show that consumers have some interest in using these apps, especially younger consumers. However, apps on this topic should be easy to use and consumers should be able to scan the products easily.

The chair thanked the speaker for the excellent presentation.

6. Reminder of professional secrecy and handling of classified information

The chair reminded the members the obligation of professional secrecy and handling of classified information as stipulated in the Commission Decision establishing the Platform².

The chair explained that the purpose of this reminder is linked to the fact that some information presented within the subgroup may have, sometimes, commercial implications and such information should therefore not be shared without the consent of the source.

¹ In this context, the following report was shared: Latest EU barometer on attitudes towards food: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2241>

² Article 12 of Commission Decision of 24 January 2017 establishing Commission Expert Group 'Platform on Animal Welfare', Article 12: *The members of the Platform and their representatives, as well as invited experts and observers, are subject to the obligation of professional secrecy, which by virtue of the Treaties and the rules implementing them applies to all members of the institutions and their staff, as well as to the Commission's rules on security regarding the protection of Union classified information, laid down in Commission Decisions (EU, Euratom) 2015/443 (1) and (EU, Euratom) 2015/444 (2). Should they fail to respect these obligations, the Commission may take all appropriate measures.*

7. Next steps for the next meeting (10 March 2021)

The two presentations of the fourth session will be loaded on the digital tool.

The presentation at the next meeting will be made by CN (priority) and MTV. In case CN is not able to present, IGA will present together with an external guest, from Étiquette Bien-Être Animal.

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, 10 March 2021 (in the morning).