

Meeting of the sub-group on poultry

Fifth meeting, 18 July 2022

(Videoconference)

– MINUTES –

Attendance

Independent expert	Leonardo James Vinco Evangelia N. Sossidou
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Civil society organisations	Eurogroup for animals (EfA)
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Business and professional organisations	AVEC COPA FVE
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Member States	Czech Republic Denmark Spain Norway
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European Commission	SANTE G5 SANTE F2 (not present)
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Guest(s)	ERPA/Fermiers de Loué EURCAW-Poultry-SFA (excused) Contractor for IA Study
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Training requirements for animal handlers (skills and competences)

1. Welcome to the meeting and introduction of guests

The Chair welcomed all participants and introduced the invited guests by presenting their background and relevant experience in relation to the work of the subgroup.

2. Outcomes of 11th Animal Welfare Platform meeting

The Chair underlined the importance of the Platform's work for the Commission and the importance of the sub-group on poultry in the perspective of the revision of the EU animal welfare legislation and measures related to the ECI on cages.

3. Context of the topic by the Commission

The Chair explained the context and the difficulty with the current EU legislation due to the general requirements of Directive 98/58 and the specific requirements for broilers being implemented by Member States in different ways.

The chair underlined the need to evolve from animals being free from suffering to providing them with what is required to cover their needs and achieve a positive state. How to best address this in legislation using clear wording without room for interpretation and at the same time leaving flexibility enough to adjust to new developments while ensuring uniform application throughout the EU is the main challenge.

4. Presentation by FVE “Training requirements for animal handlers (skills and competences)”

The presenter contextualised the problem: poor management of animals due to a lack of appropriate skills/training and competencies of staff handling animals as well as a lack of tools and resources to assess said skills and competencies.

The capacity of the stockperson (e.g., knowledge, technical skills), her/his willingness to do a good work (e.g., attitude, motivation and commitment, job satisfaction) and the opportunity (e.g., working conditions, organisational policy, time, pay) will impact the stockperson’s work performance. Frequent changes of staff, language barrier, staff with no previous experience with farm animal husbandry and welfare, are challenges faced in farms.

For a good stockmanship, stockpeople should have a good general knowledge of the nutritional, climatic, social and health requirements of the animal, practical experience in the care and maintenance of the animal and be able to quickly identify any changes in behaviour, health, or performance from ‘the norm’.

The threshold for perception of animal welfare problems (e.g., feather peaking), a perceived lack of control of external factors (e.g., genetics) and a lack of time are barriers to knowledge uptake on farms. Veterinarians are important advisors of farmers on animal health and welfare and have a role to play to ensure continuous knowledge transfer to staff handling animals through tailored advice.

Examples of trainings for broiler and laying hen keepers in Denmark were presented.

General requirements for staff competence are covered by training of owners and keepers in broiler farms. However, training owners and keepers of other poultry species and categories, and training animal handlers-owners, keepers and all staff handling animals could also be considered.

When designing trainings, the format and minimum length, content (possibility to include further content in addition to the minimum requirements) and framework (checks of competences/skills acquired, SOPs to promote best practices, quality assurance) must be studied.

In addition to trainings, there are other options to support farmers’ and staff’s knowledge and skills. These options may include regular animal health visits incorporating animal welfare as already exist in some Member states, but also farmer discussion groups (peer-to-peer learning) and feedback on welfare indicators (e.g., from slaughterhouse) or farm-level recorded data supervised by a veterinarian to interpret and implement management changes.

Training also implies some economic challenges to cover expenses of more comprehensive training courses and to ensure quality management of courses. However, better training and better competence of staff will lead to better care for animals and better animal health and welfare that in turn will positively impact productivity and decreased antimicrobial use. Healthier animals with better welfare may counteract some of the expenses.

Other options to the above trainings could also be envisaged and include animal welfare education in schools, to raise awareness of European citizens in general, for both future farmers and consumers. This already exists in some Member states like Austria and Denmark.

Discussion

The group discussed how training and competencies could be included into legislation. Questions were raised on who should organise/give the training courses. The group referred to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which is a common European reference framework whose purpose is to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems.

5. ERPA: Training programmes for poultry keepers/ farmers in France

Poultry producers in France are composed by some 9.500 poultry growers, 450 pullet rearers and 2.100 egg producers.

According to national legislation in France, poultry keepers shall hold a CIEP (Certificat Professionnel Individuel d'Éleveur de Poulets de Chair). In addition, poultry keepers as well as permanent staff shall undergo training relating to good hygiene practices and development and management of a biosecurity plan.

Moreover, the national legislation establishes the terms and conditions for appointing "animal welfare referents" in all farms and the obligation and conditions of training in animal welfare for persons designated as referents in pig or poultry farms.

The first mandatory training on CIEP (Certificat Professionnel Individuel d'Éleveur de Poulets de Chair) based on Directive 58/98 and covering annex IV of Council Directive 2007/43/EC, started in 2010. Trainings on biosecurity and AW referent have been provided in France since 2020 and 2021 respectively. The content of these trainings was detailed during the meeting.

Questions:

Following the presentation, the subgroup raised some questions regarding the potential target of trainings, training level, topics, course organisers, and who could deliver a certificate. The expected learning outcomes and a detailed description of the knowledge to be acquired through the courses was judged important, as well as to have guidelines. The need to take into account national differences in practices (e.g., in beak trimming) and production methods across Europe was highlighted.

6. Discussion:

The subgroup discussed the skills and competences that should be required for staff, the length and frequency of trainings, their obligatoriness or not and the public targeted.

The group considered the 5 domains a good framework for training and made some suggestions on the topics that could be included:

- broiler directive
- general course on poultry (adaptable to the specific species and country needs depending on system)
- biosecurity
- housing conditions
- carrying a bird
- killing and stunning
- technical equipment (e.g., alternatives if the electric system fails)

The subgroup agreed that competence is key to guarantee animal welfare and that the needs and periodicity of trainings very much depend on the staff previous knowledge and experience.

A mandatory one-day training was judged as a minimum to cover the basic needs in training but was considered not sufficient by some members of the subgroup, particularly in the case of new farmers or new farm staff. A member of the group suggested to have optional higher levels of training to allow farmers upgrading their competences. The possibility to have trainings tailored according to species, and other ways of learning (e.g., e-learning) was evoked. A training frequency of at least once a year was proposed.

Regarding the target of trainings, the subgroup believed that anyone involved or taking decisions regarding animals' welfare including on farm investments should be trained.

7. Next meetings

Next physical meeting: **Tuesday, 30 August:** (9:30-17:00)

Topics:

- Animal based indicators (morning)
- Monitoring, measuring and reporting tools (afternoon)

On Monday, 29 August: drink/diner (tbc)/