

Meeting of the sub-group on poultry

Third meeting, 19 May 2022, 09:30-12:30 hrs
(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 (excused) FVE
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Member States	Czech Republic Denmark Spain Norway
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European Commission	SANTE G5 (Chair) SANTE G5
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Guest(s)	EURCAW-Poultry-SFA (excused) EY (contractor for the impact assessment study)
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Discussion

**Topic of this meeting: Prohibition of the use of cages
(in particular the poultry species and categories referred to in the ECI 'End the Cage Age': laying hens, pullets, broiler breeders, layer breeders, quail, ducks and geese).**

The Chair welcomed the participants and guest.

The Commission invited subgroup members to contribute with publications and/or studies and reminded of the functions of the Digital Tool, created to exchange information among the members of the group. It encouraged members of the subgroup to directly upload and share documents for this purpose.

1. Presentation by EfA

The representative of EfA gave an introductory presentation on the topic (see attached), addressing the background of the topic, options to address the problem, main impacts and possibilities to mitigate the impacts.

2. Presentation by the Commission

The Chair presented currently applicable EU requirements and policy options on the phasing out of cages in the EU (see attached). The chair posed a number of questions for discussion (see point 3).

3. Discussion and exchange of views

The following points were put forward following the presentations and in the discussion:

- **Specific needs** of the species/ categories to take into account when phasing out cages include:
 - Members were firm in expressing the need to have minimum requirement standards.
 - One member said that dust-bathing needs are difficult to fulfill in cages, even in enriched ones. However, apart from behavioral needs, dust bathing also encourages movement of the birds, which leads to higher robustness and consequently to less disease. Another member added that dust baths, on the other hand, possibly have negative impacts on food pad lesions and on the air dust level; that, however, this can be solved – farmers have to learn.
 - Water for bathing and for grooming nostril cleaning is needed for ducks and geese
 - Foraging – this is not possible on wired floor
 - The lack of choice in nesting is a problem since egg laying birds (at least chickens) like to use different nests.
 - Specific requirements for pullets are needed.
 - Broilers should be provided with litter, straw bales, perches and/or raised platform with sufficient free height above them and, in general, structuring of the housing. However, more than 1-2 cm of litter can also have a negative effect; ionization could provide a win-win-situation.
 - Quail need sufficient headroom because they like to jump. Currently used cages are therefore higher compared to those for chickens (in relation). As behavioral need, quail like to hide. Shelters should, therefore, be provided.
- Risks and difficulties that are likely to arise include
 - There is a higher risk of spread of disease in open air systems
 - Disease control is easier in cage systems while it has been demonstrated that disease can also be controlled in non-cages systems.

- In addition to easier control of disease spread, it is also easier to manage cage systems. The period of transition should therefore be used to educate and to train farmers. Mortality levels are now almost the same in alternative systems as in cages.
- A member stated that there is a higher risk for feather pecking and cannibalism in alternative systems. However, another member replied that feather pecking and cannibalism are multi-factorial issues. Therefore, all factors need to be looked at. Apart from high density of the kept animals and missing or inappropriate enrichment, further stressors are aggressiveness of breeds, thermal stress, missing water and a combination of these factors.
- Impacts of cage-free housing on staff requirements on farm
 - Investments that farmers have to foresee are:
 - Application of better management,
 - Calculation of higher workload for checking of the animals,
 - Establishing higher standards for biosecurity.
 - There is a **need for information, knowledge and training of farmers** and also **information to consumers** on the transition to cage-free systems. Farmers need to be made aware of the benefits that changing from cage systems to floor and to free-range systems brings to the farming business. More data are therefore needed to create an economical prospect or in order to give examples to support the information.
 - **Behavioral needs** of the animals are the most important topic on which to build information campaigns for farmers, taking into account the specific needs of the species/categories.
 - Some members asked whether the impact assessment would also look into **environmental issues**. The Commission replied affirmatively.
- Should outdoor access be foreseen as a rule (wintergarden/ voliere/ open runs)?
 - Requiring outdoor access could lead to difficulties with environmental legislation that often does not allow constructing a wintergarden and, if mandatory, high numbers of farms would have to close.
 - The possibility to use “mobile housing” should be considered.
- What are the obstacles to ban barren cages (where still allowed: e.g. pullets, breeders, ducks, quail) from 2027, if any? What are the obstacles to ban all cages from 2027, if any?
 - One member described that in their country, it has been stated that a change of **domestic fowl pedigree breeders** for egg production to non-cage systems is possible. However, investments for rebuilding are needed for such change.
 - Another member confirmed that in Italy, **meat quail** had been kept by tradition in group cages but that this is changing in the last years to floor systems.
 - For **quail kept for egg production**, the change will probably pose a problem because of difficulties to train the birds to use a nest. Today, they are usually kept in barren cages.
 - In **mallard duck** production, the change to non-cage systems could be difficult.
 - The phasing-out will probably be possible **without problem** in broiler breeders, geese, Domestic (Peking) ducks and broilers.
 - One member declared that chickens are not jungle birds anymore. Following several years of **breeding**, the parent stock is now kept in an optimal and best way with minimum risk due to health controls and minimal antibiotic use. Keeping of 30 females and 3 males together, according to that member, is a maximal simulation of nature. Another member replied, saying that needs to forage are still there and 50 to 100 years of breeding are not

much. Knowledge has increased and this is also possible and necessary for breeders. We need more social animals that are able to cope with non-cage environments.

- Considerations should not be based too much on the risk of spread of disease but rather on ethological-physiological-biological **needs of the animals**.
- As regards **transitional periods**, for species/categories that are currently not subject to specific rules, the period depends on the current common practice and on the specific situation of the species/category concerned. Some members warned that a too long transitional period could make it psychologically difficult to achieve the goal since one would think that the deadline is still far away. For domestic fowl the only problem seen is money to finance necessary investments. In general, members are of the view that there are two scenarios: one for laying hens and one for the other species/categories. Essential is training to mitigate the lack of knowledge.
- **Economic issues impacting** the phasing out and **how to quantify the welfare issues** should both be considered as key points, in order to better move on specific issues.
- Members raised considerations on the **definition of “cage”**, together with “how to ban cages” and, if so, at which part of the production. One member suggested that the definition of “cage” (in both, birds and mammals sectors) should be structured on the consideration of all behavioral needs (definition of space and height included). Cages for poultry, according to that member, have a roof, while this is not the case for mammals (pen, stall). There could be a negative definition (“no use of xyz”, e.g. no wire mesh) or a positive one, defining what needs to be used. The definition could also be based on the size: if one animal can move freely – is this still a cage? A concern would in this case also be the isolation of that single animal. Regulation (EU) 543/2008 (marketing standards for poultry meat) should be checked for a respective definition [comment: this Regulation does not have rules on cages].
- Which responsibilities and tasks should the EU reference centre have?
 - One member suggested that EURCAW should identify best practices for egg laying quail in alternative systems and prepare training for competent authorities as well as for farmers and for working staff.
- Other points:
 - The survey by EFSA could be used as reference document in the Digital Tool;

4. Overall conclusions and next steps

The chair expressed her thanks for the presentation, for the good elements provided and for the very constructive approach of this group.

The next meeting will take place on Monday, 20 June 2022, addressing the topic “Five Domains” with a presentation kindly volunteered to be prepared by EfA.