

## Subgroup on Animal Welfare labelling

### – MINUTES –

#### Third meeting

Wednesday, 13 January 2021, 09.30 – 12.30 CET, Brussels time

#### Attendance

<b>Independent expert</b>	Jarkko Niemi (JN)
<b>Civil society organisations</b>	Inês Grenho Ajuda (IGA), Alexandra Joos (AJ),
<b>Business and professional organisations</b>	Marcin Sokołowski (MS), Miguel Angel Higuera (MAH), Marie Guyot (MG), Trine Vig Tamstorf (TVT),
<b>Member States</b>	Léon Arnts (LA), Maria Teresa Villalba (MTV),
<b>Guests</b>	Gemma Willemsen (GW) Brigitte Goossens (BG)
<b>European Commission</b>	Denis Simonin (DS)- Chair Margot Kuzma Aude Luyckx Sandra Sanmartin Françoise Divanach

#### 1. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting held on 23 November 2020, were approved.

The agenda, slightly amended because of one presentation cancelled, was adopted.

#### 2. Case study 1: “Beter leven” label (NL) by Gemma Willemsen & Brigitte Goosens

GW and BG presented the Better Life label (‘Beter Leven’) - animal welfare label founded by the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals in 2007. Five years later, in 2012, the label was transferred in a separate foundation for its assurance and audits part.

The label aims to improve animal welfare in feasible steps. It is based on the support and cooperation of all stakeholders of the food chain, going from farmers to the consumers, passing by processors and retailers. A fundamental principle of the label is to give assurance from farmers until the packaged product. This is guaranteed by the quality assurance systems implemented by each stakeholder, (non-announced) audits and possible sanctions in case of non-compliance (e.g. paid inspection and ultimately-exclusion).

The three stars tiered label certifies the level of animal welfare for the main farmed species taking into account the main welfare specific species criteria. These criteria are based on scientific knowledge and developed with the stakeholders, with regular updates. Currently, additional label’s criteria - biodiversity and environment, have been included and are under development for dairy. Thanks to the ‘Beter leven’ label, 38 million of farmed animals had a better life in 2020, representing a turnover of 2 billion euro. The label involves 1959 farms (apart from organic farms), 616 processing companies

and retailers. (Market shares in the retail are over 90% for pigs, almost 80% for eggs, over 20% for broilers and 13% for beef/calves.)

### **3. Questions and Answers on case study 1**

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

1) Based on the experience – and assuming that would fall within the remit of an animal welfare NGO -, it would have been better to:

a) Start the scope of the label from the level of the basic requirements of the EU legislation. That would have allowed to also cover the products in compliance with animal welfare legislation, but not reaching the criteria of the first star.

b) Extend the label to the whole market – EU minimum legal requirements and all animal protein products -, what would have helped for the competition with (unlabeled) products imported from third countries;

c) Better clarify differences between the three label's levels, also as concerning the logos.

2) The 'Better leven' label is a fully private system. Farmers are aware of the sanctions and criteria beforehand as the information is published on the website. The percentage of 'derogation' of the criteria of the 'Better leven' label is 0,7%. Derogations are given beforehand due to factors beyond the control of the participants or innovation. Non compliances - in the sense of infringements most severe in public opinion - mostly happen at slaughterhouses.

3) Key success' factors for improving market shares are retailers (can pick up the level they wish, which can be different per specie), public awareness of animal welfare criteria per specie, willingness of different sectors to cooperate (including NGOs). The retailers only start making money with the label if they sell food processed products, not only fresh meat.

4) Audits are performed once a year and for a part additionally non-announced audits (a farmer pays for the audit carried out by the certification body). In case of severe non-compliance, re-checks paid by the farmer are performed, going up to weekly, if needed. There is no single audit database because auditing companies are using different systems depending on species. Certification bodies report to the Foundation Better Life Label.

5) Other countries are free to use the Better Life label criteria. Countries can also get advice (on the auditing system). Companies (e.g. producers) can take part in the foundation. Products for the Dutch market can use the logo/label 'Beter Leven'; outside the Netherlands the logo of Beter Leven or reference to de Dierenbescherming cannot be used/communicated.

The chair thanked the two speakers for the excellent presentation.

### **4. Presentation of the Council Conclusions on animal welfare labelling by DS**

The presenter focused the presentation on the wording of the Council conclusions, showing some convergences but also possible tensions between the different considerations.

## **5. Discussions on possible conclusions based on the case study & Council Conclusions**

While opening the debate, the Chair stated that the Council Conclusions are political with no legal obligations as the legislative initiative remains with the Commission.

Some members expressed the opinion that based on the experience of the 'Better leven', a large scale of stakeholders involved is a pre-condition to a successful EU-wide label. This should include the support from NGOs. A question is if the label should cover the "basic level", which would distinguish EU products from imported products. This could bring tension between a voluntary and a mandatory label.

A suggestion was made to combine the future EU with the existing national animal welfare labels and to consider the EU label as an umbrella system.

A concern was expressed as to the difficulty to reach a higher level in the label with slaughter and transport.

It was also underlined that the EU label should pick up on what exists to avoid a bureaucratic burden.

The Chair insisted that the subgroup has to make a concrete and specific proposal.

In case of a voluntary label, the key stakeholders should be engaged widely enough to ensure the uptake of the label. Motivation and incentives of stakeholders to participate should be ensured. From that perspective, it is important to identify the key driver for their participation (so besides improving animal welfare, e.g. is it for achieving better reputation, larger market share or better price). Different levels could also satisfy different motivations.

The label should be transparent and not too complex. The idea of protected terms seems interesting and in line with other EU labels. That might clarify communication to the consumers.

## **6. Tasks for the next meeting (9 February 2021)**

The Chair suggested IGA starts to make a draft with the aim for members of having a single template two weeks before the next meeting.

IGA, AJ and DS will elaborate a proposal paper and will let it circulate before the next meeting.

The presentation at the next meeting will be made by CN and either MTV or MAH.

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, 9 February 2021 (in the morning).