

Subgroup on Animal Welfare labelling
– MINUTES –
Sixth meeting
Wednesday, 7 April 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	Denis Simonin (DS) - Chair Rita Raleira Aude Luyckx Sandra Sanmartin Marguerite Kuzma Christian Juliusson
Guest	Laurence Bonafos DG AGRI unit B4 (organic farming)

1. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting

It was suggested that, in the absence of any pressing points to be addressed immediately, the session would start with the first case study presentation. The practical instructions were clarified, namely that the presentations should take maximum 30 minutes and they would be followed by 30 minutes of Q & A.

2. Case study 1: “Organics in the EU” by Laurence Bonafos

The speaker presented about organic production in the EU, focusing on how it is approached under the current EU framework and highlighting what is important for the work of the subgroup. Organic farming implies respecting a number of production restrictions and results on lower yields, but it allows for price premiums while still being supported by the CAP. Consumers’ opt for organic products for series of reasons, among which higher animal welfare standards, but it is not the only one nor is it among the main motivations.

When developing a labelling scheme, it is important to consider beforehand which products will likely be successful under such scheme and whether unfair competition for EU products is being enabled. It is also important to consider the having an easy-to-identify visual sign, the protection of terms/diminutives, and establishing compulsory indications to be included on the label.

Certification systems are important as a basis for consumers' trust. Therefore, it is important to have an additional system of controls supervised by competent national authorities or control bodies. In the case of organic production, operators have to register in order to be certified within this voluntary scheme. The certification is based on compliance with strict rules, which is ensured by:

- Annual inspections (on-the-spot under the current rules);
- Minimum sampling requirements (variable according to product);
- Specific system to communicate irregularities (OFIS);
- Electronic certificates (traceability of imported products).

In terms of organic livestock production rules, there are two updated regulations that will enter into force as of January 2022 (Regulation (EU) 2018/848 and Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/464). There has been a legal framework on organic livestock production since 1999, which fundamentals have remained unchanged, and focus on general rules on farm management, organic conversion of lands and animals, origin of animals, nutrition, health care, animal welfare, and housing and husbandry practices.

The general provisions and corresponding annex on livestock production cover a specific set of animal species and it can be extended as proven necessary. Currently, it includes ruminants (bovine, ovine, and caprine), equines, cervines, rabbits, poultry, pigs, and aquaculture. The organic production of these animals is regulated by a set of strict rules, namely:

- Prohibition on landless livestock;
- Specifications on the organic origin of animals;
- Breeding and housing and husbandry rules reflecting the basic principles of permanent outdoor access, lower stocking densities, and more indoor space;
- The use of cages is forbidden;
- System of derogation for introducing non-organic animals when necessary;
- Organic and *in loco* production of nutrition for livestock;
- Restrictions regarding the use of veterinary medicines, namely in terms of the number of treatments allowed for animals and a withdrawal time after treatments;
- Specifications on animal welfare.

Animal welfare in organic production includes AW horizontal rules and specific additions, namely:

- Basic knowledge and skills on the topic;
- Husbandry practices must address the needs of the animals;
- Permanent access to outdoor areas where, preferably, animals can feed in pasture;
- Prohibition on tethering and isolation;
- Minimal duration of transport;
- Avoidance of mutilation, except for a restrictive set of practices, such as tail docking, beak trimming, and dehorning, and under strict conditions;
- Physical castration is allowed (immuno-castration is not);
- Loading and unloading must take place under specific conditions, which are already included in the horizontal rules on animal welfare.

3. Questions and Answers on case study 1

Questions and considerations were raised during the discussion which followed the presentation:

- On the penalties for non-compliance with the organic production certification rules and on what is done to avoid fraud.
- Follow the same approach as done in cases of non-compliance under horizontal rules: 1) Operators report to appropriate control body/authority; 2) Inquiry on the origin of non-

compliance; 3) Check if all the necessary preventive and precautionary measures were in place. If malpractice is proved, the organic producer can be decertified. Each Member State is required to have a catalogue of measures to apply in case of non-compliances.

- On certification and inspection procedures, specifically on the occurrence of both announced and unannounced annual inspections.
 - Unannounced/basic inspections can happen at any time. However, in order to do a full check of the documents, it can be better to have announced inspections.
- On Member States' specific extra requirements (beyond EU legislation) for organic production, specifically on whether these exist in regard to animal welfare and whether these can still be further extended.
 - Impossibility to give specific details on this at Member State level at the moment. On the extension of animal welfare requirements in organic production, there are issues regarding costs and finding a good balance between desires and possibilities.
- On consumer awareness upon the introduction of the EU organic production logo, specifically on how the public was informed and how much was invested on that.
 - In introducing the EU logo, it was important to have promotion campaigns both in Member States and third countries. No figures on the campaign investment could be provided at the moment.
- On the GMO prohibition, specifically if it also applies to medicine such as vaccines, and on the limitation of the number of piglets per sow, considering that there is a minimum feeding period on maternal milk (40 days).
 - For GMOs, there is an exemption on the use of GMOs for veterinary treatments. As for the number of piglets per sow, there is no imposed limit and so far it has been working for the producers.
- On how broilers/poultry breeding is controlled and ensured in organic production
 - To guarantee the breeding of slow growing birds, there are two solutions possible which Member States can choose from: 1) Selection of slow growing breeds; 2) implement a minimum age of slaughter. Control bodies can check this on farm or at slaughterhouses.
- On the use of kilograms instead of individuals and the implications of this when referring to fish produced in aquaculture
 - Aquaculture is covered by the organic production scheme, specifically the most consumed species of fish (salmon, trout, carps, etc.). In terms of the stocking densities, they are only expressed in kg/ha for carps and kg/m³ for salmon because that is how it has been done so far.
- On the difficulty for consumers to buy organically produced meat and support animal welfare, considering that no significant increase in the supply/demand for this type of meat has been observed [added related question on whether there are percentages available on the market shares for pork, poultry, and other types of meat]
 - Overall problem for all high quality schemes. It is costly to follow organic production requirements and the premium obtained is not always sufficient to compensate the expenses. The increase in supply/demand depends on product and on the specific requirements of the scheme. As for available percentages, information is available for eggs and there is a new system of market observatories at DG AGRI that is currently providing

information on organic market shares for products such as oil and wine, but what is available for meat will have to be checked.

4. Case study 2: “Better Animal Welfare: The Danish governmental animal welfare label” by Christina Nygaard

The speaker presented the Danish market-driven labelling system launched in May 2017, which was developed by a public-private partnership between government and chain actors. The label has a modulation of three levels guaranteeing cumulative animal welfare standards, which are all above the requirements present in ongoing legislation. This label aims at creating market space for high animal welfare products that are cost-effective, engaging consumers that are not yet committed in buying organic products and empowering them through the provision of more supermarket choices.

Animal welfare has been high on the political agenda and it led to the action plan on creating an umbrella label that could be added to other labels and help improving animal welfare for as many animals as possible. The label is market-driven and a voluntary joint venture, which development involved discussions and negotiations among relevant stakeholders from the entire food chain. The criteria are dynamic and were adjusted along the way, as proven necessary. It was initially launched for pigs/pork (2017), expanding afterwards to broilers and chicken meat (2018) and veal, beef, milk and dairy products (2020). Although being a Danish label, it can be applied to imported products as well.

There are specific AW criteria for pigs, broilers, beef and dairy, which imply a set of requirements for the first level of the label scheme, followed by a cumulative addition and further strictness on the criteria defined in order to move up to subsequent levels (e.g. more space, more rooting, more outdoor grazing, better bedding materials, better conditions for farrowing, etc.). The criteria for beef and dairy were harder to establish given the specific requirements related to dairy and veal /beef compared to pigs and broilers.

According to the latest figures, this labelling scheme comprises:

- 213 pig producers, most of which produce on level three
- 240 broiler producers, most of which on level one
- 817 beef and veal producers, most of which on level two
- 597 milk producers, most of which on level two

All products under the label are subjected to state control from farm to fork and inspections are guaranteed at all levels. The primary producer may only commence delivery under the Animal Welfare Label once an inspection body or the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration has certified that the herd meets the relevant requirements. After that there are annual farm inspections, and all animals are also controlled at slaughterhouses according to the meat inspection requirements. State authorities also monitor the control programmes set up by hatcheries, farmers, companies, and retailers.

Upon launching the label, it was important to invest in marketing campaigns to create awareness and confidence and also to influence buying behaviour. There have been seven nation-wide information campaigns, which were visible to consumers on a daily basis on many platforms, such as printed media, social media, event marketing, etc. Partners also did good and comprehensive work on creating consumer awareness, by using the label in their own advertising initiatives. According to the 2017-2020 survey on consumers' confidence and awareness survey, this label performed better than e.g. the EU Organic label, even though the latter has been on the market for longer.

5. Questions and Answers on case study 2

Questions and considerations were raised during the discussion which followed the presentation:

- On whether farmers have to make improvements to join the label and if financial aid was available for this, and why not to include a label for the minimum level for compliance with the legislation.
 - There is no financial aid provided as it is market-driven label. All producers need to follow the minimum requirements by law and the purpose of the label is to go beyond the legally established standards, considering that there is consumers' demand for such.
- On the amount of resources invested in marketing the label, specifically if they were sufficient, and on whether the organization of the label is entirely government-led or is there a fee collected from participants in the scheme.
 - The budget provided for the development of the label was €2.2 million, from where some of the funding of marketing campaigns was extracted, but all the members of the partnership have contributed to this and made their own investments on it, on which no details were available at the moment. There is no fee collected from participants. The government provides the framework, the criteria, and ensures the administration of the label, and the producers must pay for the necessary inspections and negotiate with other businesses on the premium.
- On controls and inspections, specifically on whether there is a fee for days/hours of inspection services for both farmers and control programmes.
 - Yes, these fees have to be paid by all chain actors, whether the inspection is done by state authorities or a delegated control body (third party).
- On whether government inspectors are only specialized in this labelling system or are also carry out other inspections and how does that work with third parties?
 - State authority inspectors carry normal inspections on animal welfare. Third party inspections often occur for other matters as well, so they can combine inspections. State authority inspectors focus exclusively on these matters unless there are very significant problems of other nature, in which case they are reported as well.
- On animal export, specifically on whether farms can participate in the labelling scheme and still export animals (and surpass the transport duration allowed by the scheme) or must the entire animal production follow the rules of the labelling scheme.
 - At the state authority cannot forbid how the farmers sell their animals. The legislation and criteria is exclusively oriented towards the standards of production. Therefore, part of the production of the farm can be sold with other purposes and be produced out of the labelling scheme.
- On whether there are any studies on the premium for farmers comparing the levels of the label and non-labelled products.
 - Such information is not available because this is considered a business-to-business affair in which the state authority does not interfere.
- On whether there are equivalencies between the European welfare quality system and this labelling system.
 - Danish state authorities do not use the welfare quality scheme.

6. Presentation on draft conclusions

A group was created on Teams for the subgroup meetings, where relevant documents have been uploaded and can be worked on directly by several people simultaneously. The option of track changes should be used to automatically register all changes in full transparency and so the person who made the suggestions can be directly addressed.

From this point onwards, the group needs to start working on the draft conclusions, which should consist of simple and factual elements agreed upon by all elements. The working principle is to register the aspects found and their pros and cons that can be presented at the EU Animal Welfare Platform in an accessible document. Factual elements and positions should be edited differently so they can be distinguished (positions should appear at the bottom of the factual assessment under the same chapter).

This work can be initiated immediately and the next meetings will be dedicated to finalizing ideas on this, so they reflect the consensus of the subgroup based on the existing expertise. A deadline for the introduction of comments was set at lunchtime on the 20th of April (48h prior to the next meeting).

Currently, there is no further plan for the platform or the subgroups after the end of the mandate (June). If the work on this front is to continue, the platform will be closed and there will be a different mandate.

7. Planning the future meetings (22/4 PM, 5/5 AM, 4/6 AM)

The next meetings will take place on the 22nd of April (afternoon, from 14h onwards), on the 5th of May (morning), and on the 4th of June. These meetings will be devoted to the draft of conclusions. A reminder will be sent to the participants, informing about the dates/times of the following meetings and the corresponding invitations.