



EU PLATFORM ON ANIMAL WELFARE

18th meeting

WebEx video conference

Day 1: Thursday, 16 October 2025, 14.30 – 18.00 CET, Brussels time

The meeting was web streamed. Click [here](#) to access the recording.

– SUMMARY REPORT –

OPENING

CHAIR: Claire Bury, Deputy Director General for Food sustainability, DG SANTE

Opening by the Chair

The Chair welcomed the participants, in the room and online. She submitted for adoption by the Members the Rules of Procedure for the new Platform mandate (2025-2030) and the agenda. Both documents were adopted. RSPCA and Four Paws requested to present their respective points under AOB. The agenda was adopted.

Introduction of new Platform Members [\[PP\]](#)

New Members of the Platform have introduced themselves.

State of play of the revision of the EU rules for on-farm animal welfare and the study on animal welfare indicators [\[PP\]](#)

The Commission presented the status of the revision of the EU rules for on-farm animal welfare, highlighting the ongoing consultation phase, which includes the phasing out of cages for certain categories of animals, the use of animal welfare indicators and the potential application of welfare requirements for imports. The 700 responses received to the call for evidence confirmed the need to harmonize the current legal framework. An external study and a public consultation are also underway to gather further insights. Regarding the animal welfare indicators (animal-, resource- and management-based), the contributions come from the Platform's subgroup on indicators and from an external study.

Questions and Answers

The Chair addressed concerns raised by several participants regarding the inclusion of the revision of animal welfare legislation in the 2026 Commission Work Program. The Chair clarified that the plan remains to consult in 2025 and aim for a first proposal by the end of 2026, as previously communicated by the Commissioner. Furthermore, the “livestock strategy” mentioned by the President of the Commission in her “State of the Union” will include elements on animal welfare. **The Chair** also pointed out that the work program is a high-level document and not exhaustive.

Eurogroup and **FVE** welcomed the Commission's work on indicators and wondered whether it would be used in future proposals. **The Netherlands** and **Sweden** underlined the importance of the revision and offered their help with it if needed. **CIWF** stressed the importance of having an updated Commission’s communication on the ECI on cages with a revised timetable, while **WAP** emphasised that every step backward by the EC hinders efforts to improve animal welfare standards worldwide (import conditions). **Ms Padalino**, independent expert, asked which animal species will be covered by the proposal.

The Commission said that it is too early to say to what extent the results of the work on indicators would be used in the new proposals, but that the overall objective is to ease the burden on farmers and improve comparability. In addition, the Commission informed that no decision had yet been taken regarding the animal species that would be covered by the first proposal.

Group housing for calves [\[PP\]](#)

The scientist highlighted the benefits of group housing of calves, including reduced isolation and stress, improved learning and social behaviours. She also acknowledged challenges such as cross-suckling and disease prevalence and emphasised how these can be mitigated through proper management practices, improved hygiene, and better feeding strategies.

EFSA Scientific opinions on the welfare of cattle [\[PP\]](#)

The EFSA scientific officer presented the impact of various factors on cattle welfare. EFSA recommendations included increasing space allowances, providing outdoor access, and ensuring proper bedding and feeding practices. She also briefly touched on the welfare of calves and the importance of colostrum management, stable groups, and adequate space for locomotor play.

Questions and Answers

COGECA emphasized that farmers need time to implement the new rules and see a return on their investment. Furthermore, the new legislation, in addition to provisions relating to animal welfare, should also consider the well-being of farmers, who are often exposed to risks in their work on the farm. **Welfarm** asked whether the study had examined the impact of outdoor access on older cows.

The researcher responded that access to outdoors always has a positive impact on animals, particularly by reducing their stress levels.

Panel discussion on ruminants in the context of the consultations for the modernisation of the EU farm animal welfare legislation

The panel began with a general question to all participants about changes which should be made to EU legislation to modernize welfare standards while considering economic and operational realities. **A.Z.**, expert, emphasized the importance of incorporating animal-based measures and recognizing the interconnectedness of animal welfare, health, human well-being, and environmental sustainability. She highlighted the diversity of small-scale European farms and the need for legislation that supports diverse farming systems without imposing unnecessary structural investments. **INTERBEV** stressed the importance of enforcing current legislation before introducing new rules and advocated for mirror clauses to ensure imported animal products meet EU welfare standards. It also called for a comprehensive impact assessment of any new legislation, emphasizing a "one welfare" approach that integrates social, environmental, and animal welfare regulations.

Animal-based indicators for assessing animal welfare

The panellists also discussed identification of relevant and cost-efficient indicators for assessing welfare. **Arla Foods** supported a shift from input-based to output-based welfare assessments, emphasizing its potential to reflect real-time welfare conditions and highlighted the role of technology in providing objective measurements. **COPA-COGECA** proposed indicators such as reduced antibiotic use, preventive healthcare, and the use of anaesthesia for surgical procedures. **INTERBEV** emphasized the importance of regular monitoring and analysis of indicators, noting that their relevance can evolve over time and argued against fixing a rigid list of indicators at the EU level, advocating instead for context-specific tools developed by professional initiatives. **CIWF** highlighted the complementary roles of input and output indicators, stressing the need for a safe and comfortable environment that allows animals to express natural behaviours and the potential of technology to provide objective welfare assessments. **Sweden** called for a dual focus on animal-based and resource-based indicators to prevent problems and ensure minimum standards.

Challenges for implementing animal welfare standards and need for harmonization

COPA-COGECA warned against overly prescriptive rules that fail to consider the diversity of European livestock systems and underscored the importance of financial support for farmers. **Sweden** highlighted the importance of reducing animal suffering through measures like anaesthesia for surgical procedures and shorter transport times. It also emphasized the need for consistent enforcement of animal welfare legislation across Europe, noting current disparities in interpretation and implementation. **Arla Foods** noted the difficulty of aligning legislation with private standards. **FESSAS** raised concerns about the burden of complying with multiple standards and called for maximum harmonization at EU level.

Group housing and calf welfare

The panel extensively discussed the issue of group housing for calves. **COPA-COGECA** stressed the need for flexibility, allowing farmers to retain the option of individual housing during the critical early weeks of a calf's life aimed to ensure biosecurity and disease prevention. It also highlighted the challenges of cross-suckling and the need for substantial financial support for structural changes. **Arla Foods** shared positive experiences from Northwestern Europe, where calves are kept with their mothers for 12–24 hours and then grouped, emphasizing the welfare and performance benefits of this approach. **CIWF** supported a complete ban on individual pens, while acknowledged the need for

proper management to mitigate potential risks like disease transmission and called for a dedicated directive for dairy and beef cattle welfare, addressing issues like zero grazing and tethering.

Transition periods and support for farmers

Denmark shared its experience of implementing dairy cow welfare legislation with a 24-year transition period, allowing farmers sufficient time to adapt and emphasized the importance of setting long-term goals for future farming while providing adequate support for farmers. This approach was echoed by other panellists, who stressed the need for financial support, training, and a gradual transition to ensure the successful implementation of new welfare standards.

The discussion concluded with a call for continued dialogue and consultation with stakeholders.

AOB

Four Paws informed of the outcomes of the work of the “Choose Health Coalition”, made up of 7 partners, presented in the brochure [“United for the future of cats & dogs”](#) (available in paper copies).

Closing of the first day of the meeting

DAY 2: Friday, 17 October 2025, 09.30 – 12.50 CET, Brussels time

The meeting was web streamed. Click [here](#) to access the recording.

“Vision for Agriculture and Food” and the possible perspectives in this policy area

Elisabetta Siracusa, Director of Directorate International of DG AGRI, presented the Commission’s “Vision for Agriculture and Food,” published in February 2025, which outlines a sustainable, resilient, and fair agri-food model for the EU with a time horizon extending to 2040. She emphasized the ethical, societal, and political imperatives for high animal welfare standards, not only within the EU but also in its interactions with trading partners. She highlighted the importance of ensuring fairness in global trade and raising global standards to avoid competitive disadvantages for European farmers. **Ms Siracusa** also discussed the alignment of international and domestic standards, emphasizing that future legislative proposals will apply the same standards for EU-produced and imported products in a WTO-compliant manner.

Questions and Answers

Several Members raised concerns about the impact of trade agreements on EU farmers and animal welfare standards. **Ms Siracusa** responded by emphasizing the ongoing negotiations and the importance of ensuring fairness and reciprocity in trade agreements. She reiterated the Commission’s commitment to aligning trade policies with EU values, including animal welfare and sustainability.

Panel discussion on the animal welfare requirements at imports

The panel discussion focused on the alignment of animal welfare standards for imported animal products with those of the EU. **The moderator** introduced the topic by emphasizing the importance of ensuring that imports comply with EU animal welfare standards to maintain fair competition and

uphold EU ethical and regulatory principles. **COPA-COGECA** highlighted the challenges faced by EU farmers due to imports from third countries that do not adhere to equivalent standards, arguing for stricter compliance measures to protect EU producers and consumers. **BEUC** added that consumer surveys consistently show strong support for higher animal welfare standards, with many consumers expecting imports to meet the same standards as EU products.

Perspectives on equivalency and trust

Several panellists debated the concept of equivalency versus identical standards. **AVEC** argued for identical standards to ensure fair competition and trust in the food system, while **Eurogroup** emphasized the need for equivalency that is science-based and WTO-compliant and suggested using clear indicators, such as the presence or absence of cages, to evaluate compliance. **The representative of DG Trade** highlighted the importance of ethical justifications for imposing such standards, noting that measures perceived as protectionist could face challenges under WTO rules. He stressed the need for transitional periods and technical assistance for third countries to align with EU standards.

Challenges in implementation and labelling

The discussion also covered the practical challenges of implementing animal welfare standards for imports. **FESSAS** expressed concerns about the bureaucratic burden of labelling systems and the need for realistic and market-feasible standards. **BEUC** proposed a tiered, mandatory animal welfare label that considers the entire lifecycle of animals, while **COPA-COGECA** suggested a simpler approach: labelling only imported products that do not comply with EU standards. **The representative of DG Trade** cautioned that implementing such systems would require significant resources for certification and control, emphasizing the need for careful planning.

Global trade and raising standards

World Animal Protection raised the issue of using free trade agreements (FTAs) to promote higher animal welfare standards globally. **The representative of DG Trade** explained that while FTAs can include provisions for animal welfare, they often face resistance from third countries, especially when tariffs remain high. He noted that the EU has successfully included animal welfare requirements in some agreements, such as with Mercosur and New Zealand, but these are exceptions rather than the norm. **Eurogroup** and **Humane World for Animals** argued that import requirements could create incentives for third countries to adopt higher standards, potentially leading to broader global improvements in animal welfare.

Export opportunities and market realities

Humane World for Animals highlighted the potential for EU farmers to position themselves as leaders in sustainable and ethical food production, leveraging high animal welfare standards as a competitive advantage in global markets. However, **AVEC** countered that the global market often prioritizes human welfare, limiting the demand for high animal welfare products. **COPA-COGECA** emphasized the need for promotional campaigns to educate consumers and third countries about the EU's animal welfare achievements, arguing that this could enhance the reputation and marketability of EU products.

Broader implications and next steps

The panel concluded with reflections on the broader implications of aligning import standards with EU regulations. **The representative of DG Trade** stressed the importance of balancing ethical concerns with practical considerations, such as the economic viability of EU farmers and the potential for

retaliation from third countries. COPA-COGECA and others called for continued dialogue and collaboration to address these challenges, emphasizing the need for a unified approach that includes stakeholders from across the supply chain. The Moderator wrapped up the discussion by acknowledging the complexity of the issue and the need for further consultation and impact assessment to inform the EU's legislative revisions.

EFSA Scientific Opinion on the welfare of American mink, red and Arctic foxes, raccoon dog and chinchilla kept for fur production [PP]

The presentation of EFSA concluded that, for all species studied, limited improvements in animal welfare can be achieved in the current system. Therefore, additional research to establish alternative husbandry systems and address data gaps in animal welfare standards is needed.

Questions and Answers

Humane World for Animals asked for clarification of the term “enclosure” and informed that the Polish Parliament has just voted to ban the farming of fur animals.

The Speaker explained that the size and type of cage/enclosure was considered in relation to animal species and its behavioural needs, e.g. the type of movements, activities.

Fur Europe declared being ready to cooperate on further improvements in the sector.

State of play of the Commission’ study on fur animals and next steps [PP]

The Commission informed about its assessment of the feasibility and proportionality of a ban on fur farming, with results to be presented in March 2026.

Questions and Answers

Eurogroup for Animals raised the issue of public funding for the fur industry in Denmark and opposed the idea of funding further research on improving the welfare of fur-farmed animals, while with the ECI, citizens made it clear that they wanted a total ban of fur farming in the EU. EFFAB contested the figures provided by Eurogroup. AVEC argued that the consequence of the ban in the EU would be a transfer of this sector to countries with lower animal welfare standards. COPA also defended the fur farming in the EU.

Update on the Danish Presidency’s ongoing work on the legislative proposal on the protection of animals during transport [PP]

The Danish Presidency informed about the progress made on the legislative proposal on the animal welfare during transport, focusing on harmonization, simplification and high welfare standards. Key issues include journey duration, space allowances, and fitness for transport.

AOB

RSPCA informed about a [conference on responsible pet ownership](#), organised by several partners, taking place in November in Croatia, expressing a wish to present the outcomes of the event at the next Platform meeting.

Closing of the meeting

The Chair thanked participants for their contributions and informed that the next meetings are planned for 22 May and 15 October 2026.