

Meeting of the sub-group on calves and dairy cows

First meeting, 30 March 2022
(Videoconference)

– MINUTES –

Attendance

Independent expert	Francesca Fusi
Civil society organisations	EDA Eurogroup Slow food
Business and professional organisations	Farm & Animal Health Copa Copega
Member States	Sweden The Netherlands Denmark Ireland
European Commission	DG SANTE – Colleagues from Unit G5
Experts EURC ruminants and equines	

Discussion

1. Welcome & brief tour de table

The Chair welcomed participants and invited them to make a tour de table.

2. Presentation on the Digital Tool

The Commission gave a brief overview on the use of the Digital Tool for members to follow up on meetings and upload their contributions.

3. Context, mandate and timeframe by the Commission

The Commission presented the context of the mandate of the subgroup: under the Farm to Fork Strategy the Commission committed to revise the animal welfare acquis, including the Directive 2008/119/EC laying down the minimum standards for the protection of calves, taking into consideration the ECI 'end of cage age' for calves and to prepare species specific legislation for dairy cows.

The Commission has started several initiatives to help in this regard: a fitness check to evaluate the current legislative framework, an ongoing impact assessment supported by an external study, mandates to EFSA on updating its scientific advice and several other projects and studies.

Regarding the mandate of the subgroup, it is limited to on-farm and the group follows Commission rules for expert groups and the EU Platform on Animal Welfare. The subgroup will not be discussing concrete legislative drafts but rather discussing practical elements (including difficulties and opportunities) to have in mind for the revision of the current legislation on the welfare of calves or development of specific legislation on the welfare of dairy cows and present examples for good practice. The subgroup will meet once a month, with the exception of August 2022, to cover 10 different proposed topics.

4. Working method

The Commission presented the working method highlighting the following practices:

- Members are present in their personal capacity and do not represent the views of the organisations they work for;
- The group does not need to reach a consensus: open discussion expressing different views is encouraged;
- Experts can be invited for specific topics;
- The Commission will chair the meetings, which will be carried out, unless indicated otherwise, by means of teleconference. Members will receive in advance the agenda, minutes of the previous meetings and the presentations for the following meeting at least one week in advance. The Commission will if required present the legal framework for the topics at the beginning of each meeting and will highlight envisaged amendments for legislation. Then an expert will present a good practice or practice experience on the topic, and a discussion will follow.
- Chatham House rules apply for the meetings
- The subgroup is to report back to the plenary of the EU Platform on Animal Welfare

Members were invited to provide the group with information, papers, studies and other relevant documents in the Digital Tool.

5. Presentation by Commission of the list of topics proposed

The Commission informed that 10 meetings are foreseen covering 10 different issues, representing the main challenges in terms of policy options for the proposal of the new regulations on calves and dairy cows. After discussion, the following list of topics was agreed

1. Calves: Ban on individual housing (follow-up to the European Citizens' Initiative) and housing systems for suckling and fattening calves, optimal group sizes (examples of good practice)
2. Calves: Feeding management for suckling and fattening calves (examples of good practice, incl. training and requirements for staff)
3. Calves: Health Management for
 - a) calves after birth (examples of good practice for new born calves, e.g. housing, calve-cow bonding, regular examinations)
 - b) calves when moved from dairy to fattening farm (examples of good practice e.g. relevance of all in – all out systems)
4. Mutilations: debudding, dehorning (good practice for e.g. anaesthesia, pain management, skills/training and competencies of staff)
5. Dairy cows:
Housing systems for dairy cows, ban of tethering, outdoor access or access to fresh air
6. Inspections based on animal-based indicators. Appropriate tools to monitor and measure (assess) animal welfare for dairy cows and calves
7. Competence of stock-people on dairy farms and calve fattening farms, training requirements
8. Dairy cows and calves: standard operation procedures (SOPs), animal welfare officer on large farms, possible distinction between large and small farms
9. Dairy cows: health management, lameness, mastitis, metabolic disorders
10. Breeding strategies and impact on AW
Issues: high milk yield causing metabolic disorders, impaired longevity, surplus male dairy calves

The Commission clarified that the topics of the transport or killing of end-of-career cows on farm and of transport of unweaned calves from dairy farms to fattening farms are not in the scope of this subgroup but in the scope of the subgroups on transport and killing respectively.

A number of experts volunteered to present a good practice/practical experience in relation to some of the above-mentioned topics, or to identify another expert who could do so.

6. Next steps:

The subgroup members are invited to consider presenting the topics 2, 9 and 10 or to suggest experts to present these topics. The experts from the European Reference Centre for ruminants and equines are welcomed to present or to participate in the presentation of any of the topics.

7. Calendar for the next meetings

The Commission proposed dates for the next meetings up until June.