



# EU Animal Welfare strategy: 2012–2015



## Better welfare for animals: A new EU strategy for a new approach

European citizens care deeply about animal welfare, and in recent years more and more people have become concerned about the ethical treatment of animals.

Thanks to the European Union's Lisbon Treaty, animals are recognised as sentient beings, meaning that they are capable of feeling pleasure and pain. In recognition of this, the European Commission has adopted a new strategy to improve welfare conditions for animals kept on farms, living in zoos and used for experiments. The European Commission is striving to ensure that farm animals are kept and transported under conditions that do not subject them to maltreatment, abuse, pain or suffering.



The EU's "Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Animals" lays the foundation for improving welfare standards from 2012 to 2015, as well as

making sure that these standards are applied and enforced in all European Union countries.

Under the guiding principle "Everyone is responsible," the Strategy takes a multi-layered approach that includes:

- dealing with Europewide problems with a set of general principles that will simplify rules and improve enforcement;
- improving the training of animal keepers and veterinarians who inspect farms;
- supporting EU countries in their compliance with EU rules;
- building international cooperation toward improving animal welfare;
- improving consumer information and their empowerment.

The new Strategy has important implications. It seeks to improve how Europe's 2 billion chickens, egg-laying hens and turkeys, and 300 million cows, pigs, goats and sheep, are housed, fed, transported and slaughtered. It also covers animals used for experimentation (about 12 million per year) and animals that live in zoos.

In putting together the new Strategy, the Commission consulted widely with farmers, veterinarians, animal welfare organisations and other experts to help ensure that improving living conditions for animals would also make European food and agricultural products more competitive within Europe and around the world.

*“Animal welfare is an important issue for all Europeans”*

## Why does Europe need a new animal welfare strategy?

Over the years, the EU has worked hard to make sure that its rules achieve the right balance between the need to protect the welfare of animals, while also supporting the competitiveness of the EU farming and agricultural industry. However, individual countries do not always enforce EU rules strongly enough, train inspectors adequately, or effectively punish those who do not follow the rules. All of these shortcomings can worsen living conditions for animals.

**Furthermore, many consumers do not have enough information to consider animal welfare**



**factors when they shop for food.** Animal welfare is an

important issue for all Europeans, but consumers often lack or don't know how to find credible information about the treatment of the animals from which meat, cheese, milk and egg products are produced. Also, farmers, veterinarians, local officials and others involved with raising livestock often do not have enough information themselves about the latest developments in animal welfare practices.

## A new strategy for new priorities

Taking into account all of these factors, the EU's new Strategy lays out two main paths for improving how animals are treated.

First, EU-wide problems need common solutions, while still respecting the EU's diversity. The European Commission is considering a legislative framework that would simplify rules, reduce administrative tasks, and promote the EU's animal welfare standards in the marketplace.

Specifically, the Commission is considering improving the level of training for people who handle animals, and conducting animal welfare

inspections that focus on the animals themselves rather than their environment. This would give farmers better tools to determine how their animals are actually being treated.

Second, some ongoing EU efforts need to be improved. The European Commission is working to strengthen EU countries' compliance with the rules, support international cooperation, and study how to improve the treatment of farmed fish. The Commission is also studying how consumers could be better informed and help them base their purchasing decisions on animal welfare factors.



The Commission is also studying how consumers could be better informed and help them base their purchasing decisions on animal welfare factors.

## Simpler rules, better regulation

Regulations and guidelines can work, but only if they can be understood by everyone who must comply with them. With this in mind, the new Strategy includes many steps to improve standards and ensure that they serve their target: the animals.

Without strong enforcement, rules and regulations cannot achieve their goals. So the European Commission is making it easier for EU countries to enforce animal welfare rules and improve training for veterinarians who inspect farms, while also encouraging countries to share tips on ideal husbandry practices. If animal welfare rules are not respected, the European Commission has the power to bring legal action before the EU Court of Justice against countries that do not respect EU law.

To make sure that farmers and animal welfare officials are properly trained and informed, the European Commission is considering establishing



a network of “Reference Centres.” The centres’ many roles would include coordinating EU applied research, providing officials with the information they need to implement EU legislation, and supplying the Commission and EU countries with updated technical information. The centres would also establish training courses on animal welfare and other cooperative projects with non-EU countries.

*“The new Strategy includes many steps to improve standards and ensure that they serve their target: the animals.”*

## Toward international fairness

In today’s globalised food marketplace, European farmers and food producers face competition from many countries, some of which have lower animal welfare standards than those applied in the EU. This places EU farmers and producers at a commercial disadvantage, because they must invest more money in their businesses to meet the EU’s stricter rules.

To help establish a level playing field and fairness for European companies and exporters, the EU includes animal welfare issues in trade agreements and organises major international events to promote its view on animal welfare.

## Clear, accurate information for consumers

Consumers’ growing interest in how animals are treated on farms and in livestock facilities has created a strong demand for better information. For this information to work, however, it needs to be transparent and backed by scientific facts – to protect consumers from misleading claims. It also needs to be easily accessible and understandable.

Many individual EU countries have their own animal welfare information programmes. The European Commission plans to study these ongoing efforts and, if needed, will help to fill any information gaps.

Without strong enforcement, rules and regulations cannot achieve their goals.



## Animal welfare and the CAP

The European Commission believes that animal welfare is an essential part of farming practices. To strengthen this link, the EU supports farmers' animal welfare projects with funding from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the EU's main agricultural support programme. The European Commission is studying how animal welfare can be improved by tying it to CAP initiatives and funding, such as subsidies for farmers, rural development programmes and organic farming standards.



The European Union values the health and welfare of animals – on farms, in zoos and for experimentation.

## Better welfare through stronger cooperation

The European Union values the health and welfare of animals – on farms, in zoos and for experimentation. Their humane treatment is a high priority for EU agencies and staff, who work closely with farmers, farmers' organisations, veterinarians, animal welfare organisations, scientists and other experts and groups that have an important role in caring for animals.



The EU's new Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Animals for 2012–2015 represents an important step toward further improving the EU's already high welfare standards and practices. It focuses on enhancing knowledge among the many key agencies, organisations and individuals who are involved in the process. It will also work to improve the competitiveness of European agricultural products by ensuring that markets and consumers recognise animal welfare as an added value.

The Strategy's success depends on the efforts and cooperation of farmers, officials and consumers throughout Europe. Everyone is responsible.

Copyright: European Union, 2012

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Directorate General for Health and Consumers

European Commission – B-1049 Brussels

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health\\_consumer/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm)

Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use that might be made of the following information.

Language: EN

Catalogue No.: ND-31-12-535-EN-C

ISBN-13.: 978-92-79-23232-9

DOI: 10.2772/98693

