

Citizens' summary

EU strategy for the protection and welfare of animals

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

The welfare of some animals is routinely compromised in the EU.

For example, **piglets have their tails cut off and are castrated without anaesthesia.**

Lack of enforcement, insufficient economic incentives, poor knowledge on animal welfare and the absence of specific guidance for certain species are the common reasons for most animal welfare problems encountered in the EU.

WHAT EXACTLY WOULD CHANGE?

The EU is taking a series of actions to address these common problems. Dealing effectively with problems does not always need new law. Sometimes better enforcement of existing rules can make an important difference too. It is also important to develop tools that will improve the economic value of animal welfare for businesses and increase awareness among everyone involved. In particular:

1. To simplify the EU legislative framework on animal welfare so as to:

- Increase transparency of animal welfare claims;
- Focus on the results for the animals;
- Improve education for people handling animals.

2. To better use and reinforce existing actions:

- Increase compliance with EU legislation;
- Strengthen international cooperation;
- Improve information to consumers and the public;
- Optimise synergies with the Common Agriculture Policy;
- Investigate specific problems like the welfare of farmed fish.

WHO WOULD BENEFIT AND HOW?

All of us, as citizens and consumers, would benefit because we care about animals and want them to be well treated.

The Animal Welfare Strategy will improve information to consumers, retailers, food services and food processors on animal welfare through the development a transparent system for animal welfare claims.

Commercial sectors dealing with animals, in particular farmers, because the strategy will provide them with tools to better innovate and promote their actions on animal welfare.

WHY DOES ACTION HAVE TO BE TAKEN BY THE EU?

National authorities have an important role to play to protect animals but meat, milk, eggs and other animal products are freely traded within the EU. Conditions of competition have to be the same for all producers.

In addition, if Member States perform checks, finance research and education on animal welfare, their actions are often insufficiently coordinated. The Strategy will improve information flows and coordination of research on animal welfare between Member States through the proposal to establish a network of reference centres as is the case for animal health.

WHEN IS THE STRATEGY LIKELY TO COME INTO EFFECT?

The strategy is comprised of a list of actions that will come gradually into effect from 2012 to 2015. For example, in 2012 the Commission will set up an implementing plan on the grouping of sows. In 2013, it will publish guidelines on the protection of pigs. In 2014 it will consider and possibly prepare a proposal for a general EU animal welfare legislative framework, etc.