



The three EU Reference Centres for Animal Welfare (EURCAWs) met for the first time with National Reference Centres (NRCs) and National Supporting Bodies (NSBs) designated by EU governments. Aim of the meeting – organized online on July 1, 2021 - was to start developing a useful network and identification of possible collaboration/synergies. In total 61 participants from 21 Member States participated, including 42 delegates from the NRCs and NSBs, and 19 delegates from the three EURCAWs.

Programme

The meeting started at 13:30 and the participants were welcomed by Dr Virginie Michel, Director EURCAW-Poultry and other small farmed animals (EURCAW-Poultry-SFA). She introduced the agenda, including:

- A brief introduction of the three EURCAWs: Pigs, Poultry-SFA, Ruminants&Equines. This included presentations of their missions and the five core activities they have in common.
- A brief introduction of the existing 5 National Reference Centres. This includes their role and highlights of their activities.
- Workshops to discuss specific aspects of support on animal welfare legislation in Member States

The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting window titled "First National Reference Centres for animal welfare and National Supporting Bodies meeting". The main content is a Microsoft Word document titled "Agenda EURCAWs meeting NRCs and SBs 210701 (E06) docx [Lecture mode]". The agenda is as follows:

Time	Topic	Presenter
13:00	Testing of communication equipment	Marry van den Top
13:30	Welcome	Virginie Michel
13:35	Present the EURCAWs	Hans Spoolder
	• Mission and the common five activities	
	• Target groups: CA + policy	
	• Why do we meet with NRCs and SB	
	• Presentation of EURCAW-Pigs + key topics	Virginie Michel
	• Presentation of EURCAW-Poultry + key topics	
	• Presentation of EURCAW-Ruminants + equines+ key topics	Harry Blokhuis
14:05	Presentation of existing NRCs	
	What is their role? Why were they appointed?	
	Some highlights of their activities!	
		Finland Satu Raussi
		Greece Eva Sossidou
		France Alain Bolepy
		Sweden Lotta Berg
		Italy Leonardo Vinco
14:55	Workshop introduction	Harry Blokhuis

The Zoom interface shows a meeting with 48 participants. The bottom of the screen displays a grid of video thumbnails for participants: Dułanka Jordan (Guest), Camille Bezanson (CN...), Isa Kernberger-Fischer..., and Spoolder, Hans. A chat window on the right shows a message from "AH" saying "First National Reference... Good afternoon" with a "Reply" button.

EURCAWs

Dr Hans Spoolder, Director and coordinator of EURCAW-Pigs, presented the aim and activities of the EURCAWs. They aim at improving the enforcement of the legislation on animal welfare, which is one of the Commission's priorities. They provide technical support and coordinated assistance to National Competent Authorities in carrying out official controls in the field of animal welfare. They also contribute to the dissemination of good practices on animal welfare in the EU. In particular, by providing scientific and technical expertise, carrying out studies and developing methods for improving and assessing the welfare level of animals. The three centres have five core activities in common:



- Coordinated assistance - Central contact point for Competent Authorities, networking and prioritising effort.
- Scientific and technical studies – Provision of knowledge on priority areas and demonstration of good practices.
- Animal welfare indicators – indicators and methods for assessment and improvement.
- Training courses - evaluation of training needs and develop standards/blueprints for effective training.
- Dissemination of research findings and innovations – All outputs are available and easily accessible by a portal/website for each centre.

EURCAW-Pigs was the first reference centre, designated by the Commission in March 2018. Key topics for which reviews and [webdossiers](#) are developed are:

- Tail biting and tail docking.
- Farrowing housing and management.
- Group-housing and mixing of sows.
- Climate control and space allowance during transport of pigs.
- Fitness for transport of pigs.
- Arrival and lairage management at pig slaughterhouses.
- Pig stunning and bleeding.
- On-farm killing.

From 2021 onwards:

- Measures to prevent heat stress on farm.

EURCAW-Poultry-SFA started in October 2019, and has the following priority areas:

- Welfare of broilers on farm.
- Welfare of laying hens in alternative systems.
- Assessment of welfare during electrical waterbath stunning for broilers and turkeys.

From 2021 onwards:

- Welfare of rabbits on farm with a special focus on alternative systems

EURCAW Ruminants&Equines was designated recently, and the work has not started yet. Prof Harry Blokhuis, Director, introduced the management and expert teams of the Centre and the plan to explore an issue that concerns all species covered by the Centre: the richness of the environment. A range of topics will be addressed, from conditions that result in poor welfare to conditions that promote positive welfare.

National Reference Centres

The existing 5 National Reference centres presented themselves by describing their role and highlighting their activities:

[Finnish Centre for Animal Welfare](#), by Satu Raussi:

- Network of animal welfare specialists, located in the Natural Resources Institute Finland.



- The staff includes Satu Raussi and Tiina Kauppinen, who both work in close collaboration to the advisory board. The centre is funded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Finland.
- The Centre strives to improve animal welfare through active collaboration with stakeholders.
- The work is based on scientific research and knowledge, aiming at improving and safeguarding the welfare of all animals.
- The Centre writes reports, blog posts, columns, statements, best practise guides etc. (mainly in Finnish). Social media and this website are their main channels of communication.

Assistance to Greek authorities, by Dr Evangelia Sossidou, Veterinarian-Research Director:

- The [Veterinary Research Institute](#) of Thessaloniki, established in 1997, is a research unit of the Hellenic Agricultural Organization DIMITRA.
- The institute is the unique at national level research unit focusing on Veterinary Science and provides scientific support to the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food.
- ELGO DIMITRA is a legal entity of the public sector and promotes research and technological activities in the agricultural production sector within the framework of national and EC agricultural policy.
- Resources to share are (1) materials, e.g., factsheets, guides, courses, e-learning modules; (2) Popular articles (DIMITRA); (3) Regulatory, scientific and technical documents; (4) Scientific opinions developed for EU Committees and Scientific Organizations.

[French Reference Centre for Animal welfare](#), by Dr Alain Boissy, Director:

- Since 2017, the Centre brings together experts in research, development and training.
- Its creation is one of the key pillars of France's national strategy for animal welfare (2016-2020) and is supported by the French Ministry of Agriculture and Food.
- Partners are public, private and voluntary organisations involved in animal welfare. Scope of action is on animals under human care: farm animals, pets/companion animals, and captive wildlife.
- The Centre has an advisory committee bringing together all those involved in animal welfare to facilitate consultation and shared reflection.
- The activities of the Centre fall into three areas:
 - Scientific and technical knowledge hub: Information and documentation platform.
 - Scientific and technical support to public authorities, organisations and voluntary associations, and identify knowledge gaps.
 - Information on training: encouraging and promoting education and continuing professional development on animal welfare.
- Resources are available on its [website](#) in both French and English

[Swedish Centre for Animal Welfare](#), by Prof Lotta Berg, Director:

- Located at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.
- Focusing on farm animals, but covering also companion and sports animals, research animals, wildlife and any species kept by humans.
- The Centre has two primary functions:
 - To support training and professional education in the animal welfare area.



- To offer expert support and expert advice in this area, to the competent authorities (focus) and others.
- Other activities:
 - National Contact point for animal protection at the time of killing (Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009).
 - DISA online training material for animal welfare at slaughter: <http://disa.slu.se/en/>

Italian Reference Centre for Animal Welfare, by Dr Luigi Bertocchi, Director:

- Italian network of “Istituti Zooprofilattici” has its headquarters at Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale della Lombardia e dell’Emilia Romagna ([IZSLER](#)), in Brescia.
- Develops guidelines and checklists applied both in official controls as well as in voluntary welfare assessment schemes for the main farmed species. For this purpose, the [ClassyFarm](#) system is used, categorizing Italian farms according to risks, using an integrated approach for veterinary public health.
- Covers all areas: on farm, transport, slaughter.
- Target groups are comparable to those of the EURCAWs: official inspectors, policy makers, but also veterinarians and farmers.
- Involved in training.

Workshops

Prof Harry Blokhuis introduced three workshops aiming to discuss specific aspects of support to Member States on animal welfare. For this purpose, the participants were allocated to break-out rooms in two rounds:

Round 1 of workshops: The first round was a 30 min workshop about Scientific and Technical issues. Delegates were grouped by species (pigs, poultry, cattle), based on expertise and/or preference, and there were in total six subgroups. Topics that were discussed were, e.g., scientific and technical expertise in relation to national questions on welfare legislation issues and topics prioritised, indicators to assess animal welfare during official controls, inspiring examples of good practices, etc.

Round 2 of workshops: The second round consisted of 2 workshops: Training and Communication. The delegates were now randomly allocated to six subgroups (3 for training and 3 for communication). The original plan to switch the topic for the subgroups after 30 min, but due to time limitations this was not done. Examples of issues that were discussed:

- Training: organization of training of countries CA’s or Policy workers, required skills and knowledge, prioritised topics of training sessions.
- Communication: good ways to communicate with CA’s or Policy workers (via digital means, direct interaction), existing language issues, EURCAWs’ websites and available documents/information/knowledge.



Conclusions & summary

Following the workshops, the moderators of the workshops prepared a wrap-up of the outcomes of the workshops: how to strengthen the collaboration between NRCs, NSBs and the EURCAWs for the purpose of supporting the Member States? Key outcomes for shared issues and activities are:

Scientific and Technical issues:

Pigs:

- ✓ Tail biting, farrowing crates and castration are main topics.
- ✓ Indicators for outdoor farming are increasingly relevant (“End the cage age”).
- ✓ Iceberg: intact tails.
- ✓ Export outside EU also influences welfare concerns (castration!).
- ✓ Finnish + Slovenian demonstrators for intact tail farms.

Poultry:

- ✓ Sharing of good and best practices: Catching of poultry, share resources on self assessment of broiler welfare (e.g., ClassyFarm tool), example of assessment of broiler welfare at pre-slaughter (available in Dutch, French and English: <https://shiny.ilvo.be/Welltrans/>).
- ✓ Share info about animal welfare indicators.
- ✓ Examples of need: Interpretation of legislation; DOA, when did animals die? Find a tool to have more information on animals that died on arrivals.
- ✓ Through the network we can share knowledge (including the query) and tools.

Ruminants & Equines:

- ✓ Many topics: e.g. welfare of young males (cattle, sheep, goats, buffaloes), heat stress, emergency slaughter.
- ✓ Need to define common and peculiar issues in relation to the production systems and the social and economic impact parameters for the production sustainability.
- ✓ Role of EURCAW; strengthen network and personal relations.

Training:

Different suggestions:

- ✓ Collect and exchange golden programmes and materials implemented.
- ✓ Prioritise by animal species the learning needs in the EU.
- ✓ Open access elearning courses on AW can be promoted via the EURCAWs websites upon assessment.
- ✓ Create a training network to address the EURCAWs training strategy.
- ✓ Identify training organisers in Member States where the NRCs or SBs do not handle training to establish with them a win-win cooperation for the above scopes.

Better practices:

- ✓ Train the Trainers for the national system.
- ✓ Produce scalable training programmes and materials.
- ✓ Harmonise the training contents for farmers and inspectors.



Communication:

- ✓ We first need to organise ourselves and get to know each other to be able to jointly support the Member States: create a community/network.
- ✓ Our target groups have different needs, but they have in common that they need digested/processed scientific information:
 - Policy makers want to have scientific evidence.
 - CAs/inspectors struggle with the interpretation of legislation and need tools to help them with that, e.g., how to deal with Animal Based Measures.
- ✓ Factsheets and sharing them between Member States are a real help and several NRCs/NSBs are willing to support translations into the mother language.

Closing and survey

A survey was sent to the participants after the meeting asking for more specific and in-depth information on certain issues. The results can be found in Annex I.

Dr Virginie Michel closed the meeting at 17:30h.



Annex I. Results of the survey

A survey was sent to the sixty-five meeting participants via e-mail. Thirty-six participants (respondents) filled in the survey.

The survey will allow the three centres to better understand the EU MSs CAs needs and how we can structure a European Animal Welfare network.

Were you satisfied in terms of organization?

Answers:

- Generally, the meeting was well organized.
- Most of the respondents were satisfied with the virtual meeting option.
- For future meetings logistic and organization of subgroups in different breakout rooms should be improved.
- The workshops should be a bit longer according to several respondents.
- Giving more time for discussion and exchange between participants should be envisaged.

Were you satisfied in terms of content?

Answers:

- The meeting was relevant to respondents work activities.
- Most of the respondents were satisfied with the content of the workshop.
- Sending in advance a survey to all countries regarding their interest should be envisaged for future meetings.

Do you want to share information and contact details?

Answers:

- Most of the respondents are willing to share their work e-mail with other participants.
- The majority of respondents were interested in participating in an animal welfare network.
- A lot of respondents are willing to share documents, and proposed topics.
- With regard to translations, eight respondents indicated they could provide EU-level interest documents to be translated from national languages to English.

Pigs

Iceberg indicators: EURCAW-Pigs provided a preselection of potential 'Iceberg Indicators'. Respondents were asked for each sector (on farm, transport, slaughterhouse) to select one indicator that may serve as an 'Iceberg' or to suggest an alternative 'Iceberg Indicator':

Answers:

Welfare on farm

Response rate: 100.0%

	Nbr
Docked and/or injured tails	12
Mortality	5
Frequency of medication use	2
Alternatively	1
Total	20

- Alternative suggested: "Euthanasia - dying pigs are not euthanized but left to die on their own; general problem connected to genetic: large litter size, consequently a lot of very small and light piglets in the litter which are not cap."

Welfare during transport

Response rate: 100.0%

	Nbr
Exhaustion and/or fatigue	14
Dead on arrival	6
Alternatively	0
Total	20

Welfare at slaughter

Response rate: 100.0%

	Nbr
Effectiveness of stunning: percentage of animals that need re-stunning	17
Equipment settings: gas concentration and duration of exposure electrical parameters and point of application (on the body)	3
Alternatively	0
Total	20

Centralized databases:

The availability of centralized databases was discussed during the meeting. For example, tail lesions scoring at ante-mortem or post mortem meat inspection.

Answers:

- Eight participants know of any central collection:

If yes, please indicate which indicators

Response rate: 100.0%

	Nbr
in germany: lungs, pleura, heart, liver, intestine, bursitis, joint inflammation, tails, ears, skin, skin lesions from handling	1
many see: https://www.sikava.fi/PublicContent/IntroductionInEnglish	1
Pig Antemortem system at slaughterhouses	1
results of slaughter inspection but also including specific aw indicators	1
Risk assessment for tail docking: structures, management and ABMs	1
Risk assessments for tail biting are being held in a database managed by Animal Health Ireland. Department of Agriculture are collecting AM data from the slaughterhouses	1
tail docking	1
tail lesions at ante mortem inspection, % of tail lesions in a sample of pens at farm level	1
Total	8

If yes, are these data are owned by the

Response rate: 60.0%

	Nbr
Non response	8
I don't know	5
competent authority (or any other official body)	4
by the industry	3
Total	20

- More than 80% of respondents were unaware of automatic assessment of tail lesions/intact tails at slaughterhouses in their countries.

Examples of good practices:

EURCAW-Pigs is looking for demonstrators or inspiring examples, i.e. farms, transport companies and abattoirs that are good practices in implementation of EU legislation. The participants were invited to provide demonstrators/inspiring examples they know personally (e.g. from on-farm projects).

Answer:

- This question received a low response rate and only few respondents indicated the availability of good practice examples and/or materials.



Poultry

Iceberg Indicators

EURCAW-Poultry-SFA has been asked to suggest 'Iceberg Indicators'. 'Iceberg Indicators' are defined as indicators helping the official inspectors to have a quick overview on possible animal welfare problems on farm, transport, or slaughterhouse, which they inspect. The participants were asked to give their preferences among a preselection of potential 'Iceberg Indicators'.

Answers:

- Regarding poultry welfare on farm, 'mortality' was the indicator selected most commonly, followed by 'injured birds' and 'walking ability'.
- Regarding poultry welfare at slaughter, 'Foot Pad Dermatitis (FPD)', 'dead on arrival' and 'panting during lairage or at arrival' were the most chosen potential 'iceberg indicators' by respondents.

Possible demonstrators:

EURCAW-Poultry-SFA also is looking for demonstrators or inspiring examples. The participants were invited to provide demonstrators/inspiring examples they know personally (e.g. from on-farm projects).

Answer:

- This question received a low response rate and only few respondents indicated the availability of good practice examples.

Ruminants & Equines

Dissemination:

What are the most recent dissemination outputs for your Competent Authority?

Answers

Only six recent dissemination outputs were proposed:

- 2020 report in Finnish
- Access to pasture.
- Animal protection during transport, goat on-farm welfare, how hedgerows help mitigate the effects of drought, awareness campaign for a rational use of antibiotics
- Animal welfare guidelines for unweaned dairy calves
- Feeding of Dairy calves
- How to perform deeper official controls (using new checklists)

What could be future dissemination priorities for your Competent Authority?

Answers:

Seven future dissemination priorities were proposed:

- Suffering endured by cattle and horses during bull riding.
- Assessment of animal welfare at pasture.
- Calves rearing, enrichment of ruminants/equines environment
- Properly handling of sick/injured animals on farm, especially in case euthanasia or emergency slaughtering are suggested; trainings on how to properly perform castration/disbudding and how to manage young calves (male and female)
- Technical and scientific support --I work within a National Reference Laboratory for Animal Health, and we would like to establish a lab for Animal Welfare.
- Unweaned calf transport; AMR & animal welfare implications
- Welfare of older horses, welfare of young animals, on-farm slaughtering

What would be interesting to find on the future EURCAW Ruminants & Equines website?

Answers:

- A list of experts and their respective skills + links with the various national and European centers
- Any kind of information about analyses which can be performed in this area -laboratory and welfare
- Any kind of information on laboratory tests that can be performed in relation with welfare indicators
- E.g. scientific opinions, factsheets, good practice guides, latest relevant news, target-specific content (especially with regards to horses : farmer-focused content vs. owner-focused content)
- Factsheets on European legislation, EFSA opinions, best practices ; a list of the main bodies dealing with ruminant welfare in Europe and their function; a bibliography for each specie etc...
- Guidelines and videos of good practice
- guides on good practices regarding slaughter and transport
- Occurrence of welfare problems, ways of solution, ...



- Practical examples (video or photos) about best farming practices in intensive rearing systems (e.g. new feasible methods of animal husbandry, etc)
- The procedure to contact EURCAW, the priorities dealt with (Activity 2 & 3 of EURCAW), reports and fact sheets of the work done (incl. practical solutions)
- Thematic dossiers, teaching materials, best practice
- Welfare guidelines that are present in individual member states

Would you be interested to have access to a Twitter account?

Answer:

- Two thirds of respondents were interested in a Twitter account.

Training

According to you, which specific training topic would be useful for your Competent Authority?

Answers:

Nine respondents proposed useful specific training topics:

- Not for us, but for other authorities
- Ante-mortem assessment at slaughter
- Monitoring of gas stunning
- How to carry out on farm inspections for tail biting - how and what to score to provide insight into the risk for biting
- Finding iceberg indicators (especially among ABMs) to be collected on farm or at slaughterhouse in order to identify farms at higher risk of poor welfare
- Evaluation of welfare during transport and in the slaughterhouse
- E.g. animal based welfare assessment.
- AW in aviaries, feather pecking, cannibalism etc.
- Assessment of compliance to legislative requirements ; welfare improvement strategies