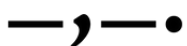


# Raising our Voices for Farmed Animals

How EU Policymakers can Improve the Welfare of Billions of Farmed  
Animals between 2024 and 2029



The European Institute  
for Animal Law & Policy

ACHIEVING BETTER TREATMENT FOR ANIMALS



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# Introduction

The Farm to Fork Strategy introduced in 2020 promised many changes. As a part of a food system transformation towards a resilient and sustainable future that can ensure sustenance for generations to come, the Commission envisaged a complete revision the EU's of animal welfare legislation.

It was a step long overdue. The animal welfare legislation is now decades old and fails to keep up with the ever-developing scientific knowledge. As countless reports show, the implementation of the existing legislation is very poor as well. Scientists in the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), who were tasked with the preparation of scientific opinions on the welfare of farmed animals, agree that the current practices lead to wide-scale suffering and recommend significant changes to make the farming models more welfare-friendly.

There is strong societal demand to improve the conditions of farmed animals. As the 2023 Eurobarometer survey shows, 84% of Europeans believe that the welfare of farmed animals should be better protected than it is now. Citizens have also voiced their support for strong animal welfare laws through the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) mechanism, notably by securing 1.4 million signatures to call for a ban on caged farming.

Although the Commission promised and committed to an ambitious reform package, the overhaul was shriveled into a revision of the rules on animal transport. As a result, the previous Parliamentary term brought nothing significant for farmed animals, leaving citizens and stakeholders disillusioned and questioning how democratic the EU policymaking really is.

The 2024-2029 Parliamentary term can and must bring the much-needed reform. In this paper, we summarize the most urgent animal welfare issues that policymakers should focus on, respecting the will of their voters and the urgent need for progress, stemming not only from rising expectations of citizens and consumers but also from challenges that the farming sector will face as a result of accelerating impacts of the climate crisis.





# Ending Caged Farming

About 300 million animals on commercial farms in the EU are kept in cages.[1] These cages severely restrict the animals' freedom of movement, causing them immense suffering, which breaches the requirement of Directive concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes (98/58). After the unprecedented success of the 'End the Cage Age' ECI, both the European Commission and the Parliament gave their firm support to the potential ban, but the promise remains unfulfilled. As a result, the organizers behind this ECI took the Commission to the European Court of Justice over the failure to present a legislative ban by 2023.



Cages facilitate intensive animal farming, since they allow for a higher concentration of animals and limit space per individual. As such, they **prevent animals from engaging in behaviours** that are natural to them, suppressing their needs. That leads to great frustration, anger and stress and despair.

The space provided to animals in cages is totally inadequate. EU law only sets minimum requirements for space in cages afforded to hens and calves, which equates to the **size of one A4 sheet of paper for hens**. Sow stalls or farrowing crates for mother pigs are so narrow that even turning around is not possible. Most cages used in farming are barren, save for the 'enrichment' required by law for laying hens — and this is far from sufficient. Foraging, exploring, grooming, natural socialisation with peers and the young, flapping wings, jumping or even sitting

with ears straight up it not possible for caged animals.

Many Member States have recognised the cruelty of caged farming and heard the calls of their citizens, **banning the use of cages** for certain species in their territories. These include a ban of caged farming for laying hens in Germany, Austria, Czechia or Denmark, a ban of sow stalls and farrowing crates in Sweden or a ban of cages for rabbits in Belgium.[2]

With EFSA confirming the plethora of negative welfare and health consequences of caged farming and recommending the phasing out of cages in several scientific opinions[3] and citizens' undeniably strong support for this step, it is up to policymakers to step up and make cages the relic of the past, respecting the will of citizens and upholding the democratic values of the EU.



### Who is in the cage?



160 million



110 million



10 million

...plus millions of calves, ducks, geese, quail and parent stocks of poultry [1]



# Improving Chicken Welfare

Chickens kept for meat (also called 'broiler chickens') are the most populous land farmed animal not only in the EU, but in the world. Several billions are killed in the Union each year to produce meat.[4] Although they are one of the species with 'their own' directive, which sets some basic requirements for their keeping, their protection is below par by far. Most of these chickens have been selectively bred to grow rapidly fast, leading to a wide range of health problems which condemn chickens to a very short life of immense suffering.



A fast-growing chicken is usually sent to slaughter weighing around 2.5 kilograms, at the age of five to six weeks (compare it to a 'common' chicken's life expectancy of 5-10 years). Not surprisingly, this growth rate and **unproportionally large breast muscles** put a huge strain on a chicken's body. That includes metabolic illnesses, cardiovascular illnesses and locomotion disorders, such as lameness and complete immobility as chickens are unable to carry the weight of their muscles at a time when they are still baby animals. Although EU legislation forbids breeding methods which cause animals suffering, this provision is widely ignored and chickens are selectively bred to grow fast without any regard for their well-being.

The Broiler Directive adopted in 2007 sets basic standards for the keeping of chickens, but these ignore the issues of selective breeding, do not require any environmental enrichment and allow stocking density of up to 42 kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

Such high density limits animals' movement, increases the risk of heat stress, hinders animals from engaging in natural behaviours and increases the risk of injuries, group stress and rest problems. As the quality of litter is often insufficient, chickens, who spend most of their time lying down, tend to **suffer from painful foot lesions**.

Despite their miserable short life and despite their huge numbers in the EU, the welfare of chickens kept for meat is largely overlooked. As scientists from EFSA recommended, fast-growing breeds of broilers (i.e. those that grow more than 50g/day) should no longer be kept because **serious health and welfare issues are inevitable**. Moreover, the stocking density should be kept to 11 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, to allow for more movement and body heat dispersion, and broilers should be provided with clean, regularly changed litter, access outside and environmental enrichment to encourage movement.[5]

### Did you know that....



1957 - 905 g

2005 - 4202 g

\* both chickens are 56 days old

...broiler chickens are now nearly 5 times as heavy as in 1950s?[6]

... if a human child grew at the same rate, a two-month old baby would weigh 300 kilograms?[7]



# Reducing Stocking Densities

All across Europe, animals are kept in so-called 'factory farms' — systems that house hundreds or thousands of animals where they are bred or fattened for slaughter. Such concentration of animals inevitably brings many problems. Animals are not provided individual care when sick or injured, the space afforded to them is minimised and the unnatural composition of their social groups leads to severe behavioural problems, such as aggression or even cannibalism.



## Factory farms: environmental disaster unfolding

- Agriculture, especially animal farming, produces 53% of methane emissions, [14] a greenhouse gases with a high global warming potential, and 60-90% of ammonia emissions in the EU [15]
- 62% of all European cereal crops are used to feed animals [16], but meat and dairy provide only 17% of calories [17]
- 80% of soy worldwide is used to produce feed, linking the EU production to the deforestation of rare ecosystems through imports of soy from South America [18]
- Over 70% of EU farmland is used to feed animals farmed for food [10]
- Globally, 60% of biodiversity loss can be attributed to land conversion for agricultural use [19]

Many of the pressing animal welfare issues on EU farms have a common root — high stocking density, that is keeping too many animals restricted. There is a plethora of **physiological and behavioural problems** stemming from treating animals more like machines and less like sentient beings, which then lead the industry to adopt 'quick fix' measures, such as confining animals to cages or mutilating them, instead of addressing the core issue. Once animals' needs are suppressed and unfulfilled, they will manifest in 'unwanted behaviours' and the animals' welfare and health will inevitably decline.

But it is not only animal welfare that is threatened by factory farms. Intensive farming systems are an **ideal breeding ground for pathogens**, as animals are crammed close to each other and have been made genetically so homogenous that pathogens have a much easier time spreading from animal to animal. Factory farming is not only a major driver of antimicrobial resistance, with almost **70% of antibiotics worldwide used in farming**, [8] it is also a potential birthplace of future zoonoses. [9]

With the trend of increased concentration of animals on farms, almost **three-quarters of EU animal production now comes from the largest farms**. [10] This has wide-reaching consequences on our climate and nature, forcing a change towards 'less and better'. Reducing the stocking densities on farms and the overall number of animals kept in the EU, accompanied by a diet shift towards healthier, plant-based diets is a necessary step, as many scientific studies caution us. [11] [12] [13] Providing animals with a better quality of life, including more space, access outside and environmental enrichment, will in turn benefit humans and our future generations.





# No More Routine Mutilations

Millions of animals in the EU undergo painful mutilations. To put it very simply, parts of their bodies are cut, so they 'fit' the intensive farming systems better. This is done mostly without medication, i.e. no anesthesia or analgesics, leaving animals in pain even weeks after the procedure. While EU law regulates some of these mutilations, the rules are widely breached. These procedures are unnecessary and are only used to 'mitigate' behavioural problems stemming from the poor conditions animals live in.



## What mutilations are performed?



### Pigs

Tiny piglets undergo tail-docking, teeth-clipping or grinding and male piglets are castrated to prevent boar taint



### Poultry

Within a first few hours of their lives, baby chicks' and turkeys' beaks are partially cut (debeaking)



### Cattle, sheep and goats

Disbudding (removing not-yet formed horns) or dehorning is performed on young or adult animals

Life for animals in factory farms is inherently unnatural. Instead of spending their time foraging, they are confined with little space to move around. Instead of exploring, they live in mostly barren environments. Instead of living in a small group with an established hierarchy, they live in huge groups. This leads to stress, aggression and even cannibalism.

To reduce the fighting caused by frustration and stress, the industry **mutilates animals**, mostly when they are very young. Legislation does not require animals to be given medication to lessen the pain and sometimes, it takes a very long time for the pain to go away — studies show that in some cases, it may linger their whole life. [20]

EU law explicitly forbids routine tail-docking of piglets and this mutilation may only be performed as a last-resort solution. This prohibition takes into account that pigs, as intelligent and curious animals, tend to bite each other's tails out of boredom, and a richer environment helps mitigate this problem. However, **nearly all pigs are tail-docked in the EU** (the only exception being pigs in Sweden and Finland),[21] showing that this practice is indeed performed routinely, and the failing implementation of this provision is a sad example of the low level of farmed animal protection in the EU.

Mutilations are not a necessity, they are simply a **'temporary fix' for the industry at the stake of animal welfare and health**. When animals are provided with a proper environment, for example, material they can manipulate and play with or more space to roam and explore, the need for mutilation goes down rapidly.[22] This is why routine mutilations must be banned and only permitted for veterinary reasons, strictly on a case-by-case basis, and using both anesthetics and analgesics.



# Better Welfare for Aquatic Animals

It is estimated that up to 1.3 billion fishes in aquaculture systems are slaughtered in the EU each year.[23] While a growing body of research now indicates that fishes are capable of feeling pain and EFSA stated that there was '*evidence for the neural components of sentience in some species of fish*' back in 2009,[24] this is not yet reflected in the legislation. Fishes, as well as other aquatic animals, are overlooked by the EU and the laws on animal welfare apply to them in a very limited manner, making it possible for the aquaculture industry to focus merely on profit, at the expense of animal health and welfare.



About 30% of fishery and aquaculture products consumed in the EU comes from farms.[25] In most of those, fishes are reared intensively. High stocking densities in intensive aquaculture encourage aggression among the animals, lead to poor quality of water due to accumulation of ammonia and support the **spread of illnesses**, which then leads to high mortality of fishes in aquaculture. As most fishes are kept in barren environments, which is far from the rich ecosystems they normally live in in the wild, they cannot fulfil their behavioural and physiological needs. The manipulation of fishes, especially if it involves being taken out of water, leads to **injuries and suffering**.

While the European Commission has acknowledged the gaps in laws when it comes to fish welfare,[26] little has been done to improve the situation. The Common Fisheries Policy **greatly overlooks animal welfare** and focuses mainly on increasing productivity, which

is not surprising considering how little attention is paid to aquatic animals in the EU.

And, it is not only fishes. Invertebrates, such as **lobsters, crabs or octopuses** are not even included in the scope of the general Directive concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes (98/58). Even today, **cruel boiling of lobsters and crabs alive** is allowed, disregarding the sentience of these animals. Despite the clear evidence showing that octopuses would suffer in farming settings,[27] there are plans in motion to open **the first octopus farm** in Europe.[28] Considering that octopuses are solitary animals with complex cognitive skills, intensive farming of these animals would inherently lead to boredom, frustration, fighting and even cannibalism. The outdated idea of seeing aquatic animals as “less than” needs to be eliminated and EU law must finally keep up with science to protect aquatic animals.

### Did you know that....

... nearly 90% of marine fish stocks are either overfished or fished at their maximum yields? And aquaculture has a lot to do with it.

Since many species of fishes in aquaculture are carnivorous, up to 1.1 billion wild fishes are caught to produce feed for aquaculture fishes. But that is extremely wasteful — 440 wild-caught fishes are needed to feed one salmon in aquaculture. It is estimated that up to 86% of protein used in aquaculture feed is ultimately lost.[29]





# Reducing Live Animal Transport

Each and every day, animals are transported for hours, days or even weeks on end across the Member States or beyond the EU borders. Transports are inherently stressful to animals as they face rough conditions, new environments, and come in contact with new groups of animals. The longer the journey, the worse the impact on animals. Although the EU seemingly aims to reduce long-haul transport of live animals, the number of consignments of animals undergoing long journeys only rises.



## Animal transport in numbers

- 1.6 billion cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry are transported across EU countries and outside the EU, making the EU the biggest live animal exporter in the world[36]
- 1.4 million unweaned calves are traded between EU countries every year[37]
- More than 4.3 million cattle, sheep and pigs are exported to non-EU countries[38]
- 15 EU high-risk livestock vessels are still allowed to transport animals[32]
- Between 2021 and 2023, three quarters of the EU livestock vessels were reported to have pollution prevention deficiencies[32]
- More than 14,000 sheep died in 2018 when vessel Queen Hind capsized near a Romanian port[32]
- 900,000 citizens signed a petition to ban animal exports in 2022[33]
- 83% of Europeans think that the travel time for the transport of animals should be limited[40]

While requirements for animal transport are set in Regulation 1/2005, this legislative act has proven to be insufficient and poorly implemented. As a result, **wide-scale infringement has been taking place for years** — animals are transported while not being fit for the journey, in weather extremes including scorching heat and freezing cold and the very lenient maximum journey times are circumvented through 'hopping' between so-called assembly centres, prolonging the time animals spend on the road.

Even very **vulnerable animals** are forced to face long and challenging transports, including baby animals whose immunity has not fully developed yet, or animals in the late stages of pregnancy. Animal welfare organisations that investigate transports of live animals have reported horrendous cases of **calves starving** after more than 50-hour long journeys[30] or cows giving birth in trucks, with the babies dying. [31]

Many European animals are also sent to countries outside the EU with very low or no animal protection laws. These long journeys often occur on sea, on **subpar vessels** that pose a risk,[32] mostly **without any veterinarian on board** to take care of them. In the destination countries, abhorrent cases of animal abuse have been reported by investigating NGOs. For years, citizens have been calling for a ban on live animal exports. [33]

As studies show, **reducing and replacing animal transport** with transport of meat, carcasses and genetic material is more environmentally friendly as less emissions are produced,[34] is safer for public health as the spread of resistant antimicrobials among animals is prevented[35] and is certainly more humane, as animals are spared unnecessary suffering.



# Phasing out Cruel Slaughter

While the EU prides itself on having the highest standards for animal welfare, this speaks more on the global race to the bottom than exceptionally high attention given to farmed animals in the EU. Even during slaughter, an undeniably stressful event in an animal's life, certain practices and methods that are undeniably cruel are legal. Starting from the unsuitable handling practices once animals arrive at the slaughterhouse and ending with painful methods of stunning, the EU fails to protect animals once again.



The main principle of Regulation 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing is to spare animals any avoidable pain. For that reason, animals need to be stunned before slaughter, with the exception granted to slaughter for religious purposes. Despite that, the Regulation **allows methods of stunning which EFSA warned against 20 years ago** - the use of carbon dioxide in high concentrations for pigs and the use of electrical waterbath for poultry.[40] These are exceptionally painful stunning methods with high risks for animal welfare. Even 20 years after EFSA's recommendation to phase them out, they are still the major stunning methods and only little has been done regarding research on alternatives that could replace them on a commercial scale.

On the other hand, scientists had success in developing technologies to **replace the killing of 330 million male chicks in the egg industry**. [41] Countries such as France or Germany have already adopted a ban on

chick culling and have urged for such a ban to be adopted at the EU level.[42] Considering the welfare risk posed by the two killing methods used for these chicks — maceration and carbon dioxide — employing new technology that can prevent unnecessary suffering is a low-hanging fruit to improve the welfare of animals in the EU.

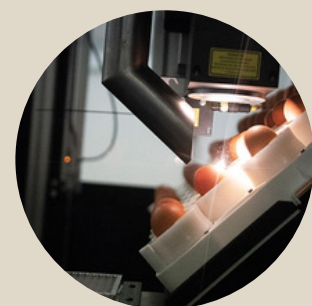
Fish slaughter is removed from the scope of the Regulation, save for a single provision on sparing animals any avoidable suffering during slaughter. But this hardly translates to practice. The methods routinely used to kill fish, among them live chilling in ice slurry, are **inhumane and painful** and both World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)[43] and EFSA have warned against their use.[44] Considering the huge numbers of fish that are killed in EU aquaculture each year, this legislative gap needs to be urgently remedied and fish need to be granted stronger protection during slaughter.

### Replacing chick culling: How does it work?



In the egg industry, newly hatched chicks go through so-called 'sexing', meaning females are separated from males. Male chicks, who have no use to the industry, are killed — usually by maceration (i.e. grinding) or gassing.

An alternative to this is in-ovo sexing. That means that the sex of an embryo is determined in the egg and those with male embryos are prevented from hatching. That should be done within the first 12 days, when an embryo is not capable of feeling pain, as a 2023 study showed.[45]



# What Can Policymakers Do?

1

**Thorough and ambitious revision of the animal welfare legislation:** The animal welfare *acquis* is severely outdated and falls behind decades of scientific findings. A full revision, as envisaged by the Farm to Fork Strategy, based on the recommendations of the EU's scientific body, EFSA, and containing standards for species forgotten by the current legislation, such as aquatic animals, is urgently needed.

2

**Implementing citizens' demands into law:** The citizens have made it clear they want stronger protection of animals in the EU. But despite the success of the ECIs focused on animal protection, their asks have still not been reflected in EU law. To prevent making the ECI tool void, the 'End the Cage Age' ECI, which received support from citizens, scientists, businesses and EU Institutions, must be turned into a legislative ban on caged farming.

3

**New ambitious rules on animal transport:** A proposal revising Regulation 1/2005 on animal transport now sits with the co-legislators. While bringing some improvements, the proposal contains severe loopholes and shortcomings, which will enable the detrimental business-as-usual to continue to a large degree. The proposal needs to be aligned with the recommendations of EFSA, to prevent wide-scale suffering of hundreds of millions of sentient beings transported each year.

4

**Changing our food system:** While the Farm to Fork Strategy or the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan recognize the need to reduce the consumption of meat and move towards more plant-rich diets, the measures which would directly support this shift are still missing. The EU must move its support, concentrated mainly in the Common Agricultural Policy, towards more sustainable and ethical agricultural practices, which would enable food production within planetary boundaries.

5

**Applying EU animal welfare standards to imported products:** To ensure a level playing field on the EU market and promote better animal welfare standards abroad, the animal welfare requirements under EU law must apply to animal products imported from third countries.







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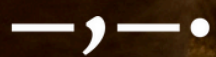
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## Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the photographers whose photos were used in this paper, namely Jo-Anne McArthur, Havva Zorlu, Andrew Skowron, Zuzana Mit, Lukáš Vincour and Human.Cruelties.





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