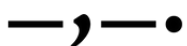


Raising our Voices for Farmed Animals

A Roadmap to Improve the Welfare of Billions of Farmed Animals in
the Current EU Parliamentary Term (2024 – 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 proposed many changes. As a part of a food system transformation towards a more resilient and sustainable agricultural infrastructure that can ensure sustenance for generations to come, the European Commission envisaged a complete overhaul of the EU's animal welfare legislation.

The proposed revision was long overdue. EU animal welfare legislation is now decades old and has fallen behind more recent developments in scientific knowledge. As countless reports have shown, even the implementation of existing legislation is typically 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. EFSA therefore recommend significant changes to increase levels of animal welfare on farms.

There is strong societal demand to improve the conditions of farmed animals. According to the 2023 Eurobarometer survey, 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 by way of a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), which gathered 1.4 million signatures from citizens calling for a ban on caged farming.

Although in 2020 the Commission committed to carry out ambitious reforms, the overhaul was scrapped in favor of only a minor revision of the rules around animal transport. As a result, the previous Parliamentary term brought nothing significant for farmed animals, leaving citizens and stakeholders disillusioned, questioning whether EU policymaking is truly democratic.

The 2024-2029 Parliamentary term can and must bring the much-needed legislative overhaul for farmed animals. In this paper, we summarize the most urgent animal welfare issues that policymakers should focus on, which would respect the will of their voters and the urgent need for progress. These changes stem not only from rising expectations of citizens and consumers, but also from challenges that the farming sector must confront 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 the 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 for enacting a ban, but the promise remains unfulfilled. As a result, the organizers behind this ECI took the Commission to the European Court of Justice over their 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 animal. As such, cages **prevent animals from engaging in natural and necessary behaviors**, which in turn causes them to experience great frustration, anger, 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 roughly comparable 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 is 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, and 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 measure, policymakers must to step up and make cages a relic of the past, respecting the will of citizens, the welfare of animals, and upholding the democratic values of the EU.

Who is in the cage?



160 million



110 million



10 million

...in addition to 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 terrestrially farmed animal not only in the EU, but in the world. Billions of chickens are killed in the EU each year to produce meat.[4] Although they are one of the species with their own species-specific directive, which sets some basic requirements for their keeping, their protection measures remain woefully inadequate. Most broiler chickens have been selectively bred to grow rapidly fast, leading to a wide range of health problems which condemn these chickens to brief lives 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 (compared 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 in the case of chickens, which 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 standards ignore the issues of selective breeding, do not require any environmental enrichment, and allow stocking density of up to 42 kg/m².

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 lives, and despite their huge numbers in the EU, the welfare of chickens kept for meat has been 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/m², 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 minimized and the unnatural composition of their social groups leads to severe behavioral problems, such as aggression or even cannibalism.

Factory farms: environmental disaster unfolding

- Agriculture, especially animal farming, produces 53% of methane emissions, [14] a greenhouse gas 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 the calories of food for humans [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 share a common root cause — the stocking density is too high, meaning that too many animals are packed together too tightly. There are a plethora of **physiological and behavioral problems** that can stem from treating animals more like lifeless inputs and less like sentient beings, problems to which the industry typically responds by adopting “quick fixes,” such as confining animals to cages, or mutilating the animal, instead of addressing the core issue. Once animals’ needs are suppressed and unfulfilled, they often engage in “unwanted behaviors” and the animals’ welfare and health inevitably declines.

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] but these systems also create conditions that could lead to 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, necessitating a change towards “less and better.” Reducing stocking densities on farms, and the overall number of animals kept in the EU, accompanied by a shift towards healthier, plant-based eating habits, are all necessary steps, as many scientific studies advise. [11][12][13] Providing animals with a better quality of life, including more space, outdoor access, 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. Routinely, farm workers cut off parts of the animal's body, such as the tail or beak, so that the animal will "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 "behavioral problems" stemming from the inhumane conditions to which animals are subjected.

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 sometimes 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. Often, it takes a very long time for the pain to go away — studies show that in some cases, pain from a mutilation may persist for the rest of the animal's 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 or frustration, but 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 shameful example of the low level of farmed animal protection in the EU.

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



Better Welfare for Aquatic Animals

An estimated 1.3 billion fish in aquaculture systems are slaughtered in the EU each year. [23] While a growing body of research attests that fish feel pain, and EFSA has stated that there has been “evidence for the neural components of sentience in some species of fish” since at least 2009,[24] these scientific and common sense conclusions have not yet been reflected in the legislation. Fish, as well as other aquatic animals, have been overlooked by the EU, and the laws on animal welfare only apply to aquatic animals 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 come from farms.[25] In most of those, fish are reared intensively. High stocking densities in intensive aquaculture leads to aggression among the animals, causes poor water quality due to accumulation of ammonia, and perpetuates the **spread of illnesses**, which can result in high mortality of fish in aquaculture. As most fish are kept in barren environments, a far cry from the rich ecosystems they normally experience in the wild, they cannot fulfill their behavioral and physiological needs. The manipulation of fish, especially if it involves being taken out of water, leads to **injuries and suffering**.

While the EC 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.

Additionally, the shortcomings in the EU's policies for aquatic animals extend far beyond fish. Invertebrates, such as **lobsters, crabs, or octopi** 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 octopi would suffer in farming settings,[27] there are plans in motion to open **the first octopus farm** in Europe.[28] Considering that octopi 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 that aquatic animals do not merit welfare protections must be discarded, and EU law must finally align with science and basic ethics 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 is a primary cause of overfishing.

Since many species of fish in aquaculture are carnivorous, up to 1.1 billion wild fish are caught to produce feed for aquaculture fish. But that is extremely wasteful — 440 wild-caught fish 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 across the Member States or beyond EU borders. Transport is 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 has only risen in recent years.

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 centers, 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, and animals in the late stages of pregnancy. Animal welfare organizations that investigate transports of live animals have reported horrendous cases of **calves starving to death** after more than 50-hour long journeys[30], and 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 many dangers,[32] mostly **without any veterinarian on board** to take care of the animals. 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] Such transport is also safer for public health, as the spread of resistant antimicrobials among animals is prevented,[35] and such alternate transport 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 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 waterbaths for poultry.[40] These exceptionally painful stunning methods carry high risks for animal welfare. Even 20 years after EFSA's recommendation to phase out these stunning methods, they are still the major methods used and little has been done regarding research on alternatives that could replace these methods on a commercial scale.

Elsewhere, however, scientists have 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 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 necessary and attainable way of improving animal welfare in the EU.

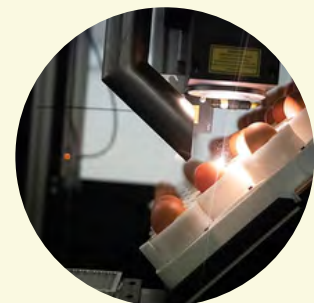
Fish slaughter has been removed from the scope of the Regulation, save for a single provision on sparing animals any avoidable suffering during slaughter. But this hardly translates to concrete measures in practice. The methods routinely used to kill fish, among them live chilling in ice slurry, are **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. *In-ovo* sexing 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 neglected in the current legislation, such as aquatic animals, is urgently needed.

2

Implementing citizens' demands into law: EU citizens have made it clear they want stronger protections for animals. But despite the success of the ECIs focused on animal protection, their asks have still not been reflected in EU law. To maintain the legitimacy of the ECI as a democratic tool, the 'End the Cage Age' ECI, which received support from citizens, scientists, businesses, and EU Institutions must translate to 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 animals transported each year.

4

Changing our food system: While the Farm to Fork Strategy and 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 to promote better animal welfare standards abroad, the animal welfare requirements under EU law must apply to animal products imported into the EU from third countries.



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