

Evaluation and assessment of the animal welfare action plan 2006-2010

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The Council held an exchange of views on the [Commission's report](#) "Options for animal welfare labelling and the establishment of a European Network of Reference Centres for the protection and welfare of animals"

In general, ministers agreed that information about animal welfare in livestock production could enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions and help EU farmers to obtain the desired recompense for their efforts. At the same time, Ministers made it clear that any welfare information system would have to be simple and easy to understand, as well as in line with the rules of the WTO. Many ministers also highlighted the need to avoid an increase in production costs as well as in the administrative and control burden. They also stressed the need to evaluate how to cover imported products.

Some ministers mentioned the organisation of information campaigns and the publication of flyers on animal welfare as other or complementary options for informing consumers.

Many ministers argued in favour of a label to recognize animal welfare levels going beyond the legal minimum standards. However, several of them insisted that such a label should not lead to any downgrading of food produced in accordance with the legal minimum standards for animal welfare nor to any confusion with existing standards such as those for organic farming. Some ministers expressed a preference for a label recognizing the EU legal minimum standards, which are already very high.

The majority of ministers expressed a strong preference for a voluntary animal welfare labelling scheme rather than a compulsory scheme.

Many ministers supported the idea of an information system for the "European production model" as a whole, rather than having a separate information system for each standard. Some ministers suggested a step-by-step-approach, introducing as a first stage separate information systems for some key standards and creating, if appropriate, a new information system for other standards at a later stage.

Furthermore, a majority of ministers agreed that more research was needed to obtain scientifically sound and reliable indicators enabling labelling to allow consumers to distinguish between different animal welfare levels. They supported in general the creation of a European Network of Reference Centres which could facilitate sharing of information and provide technical support for the development and implementation of such indicators.

Following a conference on "Animal Welfare - Improving by Labelling?" organised by the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Commission and the German EU presidency in Brussels on March 2007, the Council, in May of the same year, adopted conclusions on animal welfare labelling inviting the Commission to assess further this issue and to submit a report in order to allow an in-depth debate on the issue.

The Commission published its report on 28 October 2009 year, identifying various issues concerning animal welfare labelling and communication, and the possible establishment of a European Network of Reference Centres for the protection and welfare of animals. The Commission expects an inter-institutional discussion on its text, feeding its reflections in shaping possible future policy options.