

An EU Vision for Agriculture and Food that delivers for farmed animals

Status quo is not an option for farmed animals

Hundreds of millions of animals are farmed in the EU every year. Most of them are treated like commodities, often kept in confined environments. This intensive farming system is the greatest cause of animal suffering on the planet.

The crowded and stressful conditions animals are subjected to in factory farms allow dangerous pathogens to spread easily, leading to the routine use of antibiotics and other antimicrobials and the consequent surge of an endemic antimicrobial resistance (AMR). The surge in zoonotic diseases has disastrous consequences for animal and human health, but also for farmers and food security.

Factory farms, and the feed supply chains supporting them, are also driving greenhouse gas emissions, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, overuse and pollution of water, as well as air pollution. It also wastes precious resources as animals convert the grains and cereals present in their feed inefficiently into meat and milk[1][2].

Animal welfare reforms are widely supported



84% of EU citizens think that farmed animals should be better protected than they currently are[3] and 7 in 10 consumers report being willing to pay more for food produced to higher welfare standard[4]. Similarly, 88% of Europeans consider food products being produced in line with higher environmental and animal welfare standards as an important factor in their purchasing decisions.[5]



In 2023, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) produced a series of Scientific Opinions on animal welfare, recommending, in particular, that cages should no longer be used for laying hens[6], breeding sows[7], quail and ducks [8] to protect the welfare of those species.



The consensus report that resulted from the Strategic Dialogue sets clear recommendations for the EU to modernise its animal welfare rules, including proposals to ban caged farming, by 2026; to future-proof its farming system to produce and consume more sustainably; and to make the healthy and sustainable choice the easy one.

Turning words into action: what the EU must deliver in the Vision

Upgrade welfare legislation

The Vision should include a clear timeline for the long-overdue legislative proposals to ambitiously modernise the EU animal welfare rules, including the promised ban on cages, as called for by the 1.4 million EU citizens who supported the End the Cage Age European Citizens' Initiative. Similar rules must apply to imported products.

Finance the transition

The Vision should detail how to support farmers in transitioning away from factory farming with a combination of funds from the Common Agricultural Policy (including moving away from area-based payments), regional funds and the Just Agri-Transition Fund proposed by the Strategic Dialogue report.

Rebalancing diets

As part of the Vision, the EU Protein Strategy and the Plant-based Foods Action Plan must include measures to boost the production and consumption of plant proteins, to provide sustainable alternatives to consumers as well as farmers to move away from animal farming and food.

Rethink fish

The Vision should not ignore the welfare of fish and the impact of aquaculture. Legislation should reflect that 9 out of 10 EU citizens believe aquatic animals should have at least the same protection as land animals[9], and that seafood consumption puts unsustainable pressure on natural ecosystems.

References

- [1] Cassidy et al, 2013. Redefining agricultural yields: from tonnes to people nourished per hectare. University of Minnesota. Environ. Res. Lett. 8 (2013) 034015
- [2] Fry et al, 2018. Feed conversion efficiency in aquaculture: do we measure it correctly? Environ. Res. Lett. 13 024017
- [3] European Commission, 2023. [Eurobarometer on attitudes of Europeans towards animal welfare](#)
- [4] BEUC, 2024. [Farm animal welfare: what consumers want. A survey of Europeans' understanding and expectations](#)
- [5] European Commission, 2025. [Eurobarometer on Europeans, Agriculture and the CAP](#)
- [6] EFSA, 2022. [Scientific Opinion: Welfare of laying hens on farm](#)
- [7] EFSA, 2022. [Scientific Opinion: Welfare of pigs on farm](#)
- [8] EFSA, 2023. [Scientific Opinion: Welfare of ducks, geese and quail on farm](#) | EFSA
- [9] Eurogroup for Animals & Compassion in World Farming, 2024. [2024-eu-aquatic-animals-survey_ciwf_efa_sapience_results-slides_v3.pdf](#)