



Recommendations of the FVE on Animal Welfare Labelling

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The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) welcomes the initiatives and discussions in the EU and generally in Europe to improve animal welfare and it strongly supports the introduction of EU-wide Animal Welfare Labelling.

The addressees of this position of the FVE are mainly the European institutions, label production organizations, food market chains in Europe, national veterinary associations, ministries of agriculture, European and national societies for animal protection, etc.

Reasons for the introduction of Animal Welfare Labelling

Animal welfare has got a growing importance during the last decades in Europe and worldwide, to various degrees in different regions. This is noticeable in higher levels of animal welfare regulations on a national level in many European countries, and on an international level in several Directives of the EU (Brussels) and in several European Conventions and Recommendations of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg) concerning the protection of animals. As shown by consumer opinion polls such as Eurobarometer studies, considerable parts of the consumers have higher expectations on the products they are buying, in particular with respect to the conditions of housing, transporting and slaughtering the farm animals, and growing parts of the consumers are willing to pay adequate higher prices for products which are acceptable under ethical aspects. In several countries in Europe the market with label-products has grown and is relatively successful, to different degrees, whilst in many countries the market is not well developed, but seems to have a certain potential in future.

Though the market with label products has also shown *imperfections and difficulties*. Some of the reasons are the great number of labels, the great variety of label standards, insufficient information of consumers, the lack of internationally unified and coordinated labels, in particular with respect to export respectively import of the products, further sometimes insufficient controls, misuse of some terms for labels such as e.g. "bio", insufficient marketing of good label-products, and others.

The conference "*Animal Welfare – Improving by Labelling*", jointly organized by the European economic and social committee and the German presidency in March 2007 in Brussels, concluded that welfare labeling could be beneficial for animal welfare and therefore should be evaluated further. The conference showed also the actual state of animal friendly products on the market in Europe as well as difficulties and chances for the further promotion of this market.

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Essential basic principles for Animal Welfare Labelling

The FVE underlines that the promotion of Animal Welfare Labelling must involve some essential basic principles to be successful, of which the most important are the following:

1) The requirements of the higher ranked labels for animal friendly housing and treatment shall be clearly above the minimal requirements of state regulations on animal protection. The compliance with state regulations is an obligation for each citizen and shall not get a special reward. It is important, at least preferable, to include for labeling – beside the housing systems themselves, the feeding and the occupation density of the animals, and the climate conditions – also the management of the farms and the conditions of handling, transport and slaughtering of the animals.

2) The promotion and application of labeling shall be first of all a task of the *market* and on a facultative basis; the state may accompany and support it. In particular the big *food market chains* are invited to promote and introduce adequate labeling systems, which may be a chance on the market according to the changing expectations of many consumers. A labeling system without a market for the products cannot function. Adequate *higher prices* for higher ranked label products are justified.

3) An adequate, factually correct and repeated *information of the consumers* on the quality of the products and the conditions of production is essential. Widespread information campaigns by the label organizations and market chains, including the use of the internet, seem to be good means.

4) The introduction of Animal Welfare Labeling on an international level shall be understood as support of the *existing label market*, it should not be misunderstood as concurrence for existing labels. These shall not be replaced, but be able to continue, however they may be additionally marked by one of the international labels. This will be an advantage on the market. Regional preferences for the labels of products such as special texts or logos shall be taken into consideration. All existing labels should also respect the seven principles mentioned here.

5) The housing-, management-, transport- and slaughter-conditions must be regularly *controlled* by independent, well educated and therefore competent experts. This control is essential for the credibility of the labels and for the confidence of the consumers. Its costs must be covered by the market itself. *Non-compliance* of the requirements of labeling by the producers shall be avoided by adequate instruments such as a strict time limit for improvements and as the withdrawal of the label. [Good experiences for many years with controls of animal friendly housing systems of farm animals are available from Sweden, Austria and Switzerland.]

6) A great many research projects performed in the last decades worldwide, in particular in veterinary medicine and applied ethology, yielded many scientific based clinical, physiological and ethological *indicators of good and poor welfare* in farm and other animals; these criteria shall be applied for the practical assessment of housing forms of animals and for the establishment of the requirements for label products.

7) The state can promote especially animal friendly housing forms for farm animals above the legal level of animal protection by *direct payments in agriculture*, if the politics allow it; this instrument has shown considerable success for animal health and welfare.