



Some weeks ago, a new legislation on animal health entered into force, which should give better tools to veterinarians for animal care. We welcome this legislation.

In addition, as Members of the European Parliament are continuing to discuss their position on the Farm to Fork strategy, we would like to highlight the consideration of the regulation of antimicrobial use for animals by the European Parliament. We also want to underline the recent initiatives to improve animal welfare at EU level concerning farmed animals.

We will closely monitor the upcoming discussions on these issues while promoting the essential role of veterinarians.

Piotr KWIECIŃSKI, UEVP President

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PRIORITY ISSUES

Latest EU institutional news

Latest developments on the Farm to Fork strategy

Discussions on the European Parliament's initiative report on the European Commission's [Farm to Fork strategy](#) continue.

The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO committee) of the European Parliament adopted on 16 April its [opinion](#) on the strategy. This opinion underlines the importance of labelling for certain food products and that it *"could be broadened to cover animal welfare"*.

As a reminder, the Agriculture (AGRI) and Environment (ENVI) committees which are both responsible for the report on the Farm to Fork strategy in the European Parliament, should adopt the final version of the report on 3 June 2021, before a vote in plenary session.

Latest developments on the CAP reform

The European Commission, the Council and the European Parliament continue negotiating the common agricultural policy (CAP) reform.

On animal welfare, a trilogue was held on eco-schemes on 30 April, which resulted, among other things, in the Council's acceptance of the extension of eco-schemes to animal welfare.

As a reminder, in January 2021, the European Commission published a [list](#) of potential farming practices that eco-schemes could support under the future CAP, which includes among others organic farming, pesticide management, agroecology and animal welfare.

The Portuguese Minister of Agriculture Maria do Céu Antunes would like the negotiations on CAP reform to end by May 2021. A new 'super trilogue' will take place over three days from 25 to 27 May to reach a final agreement on the future CAP.

Latest news on antibiotics at EU level

Negotiations in the European Parliament on the legislation on the prohibition of the use of antimicrobials for imported animals

The European Parliament is currently discussing a new legislation to ensure animals and products of animal origin exported from third countries to the EU comply with the prohibition of certain uses of antimicrobials.

The European Commission presented a [proposal](#) for a regulation on this topic on March 2021, which aims at revising the current [legislation](#) in order to include these measures.

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI Committee) – which is the committee responsible in the European Parliament on this draft proposal – released its [draft report](#) on 26 April, which includes the committee's amendments on the European Commission's proposal.

The ENVI Committee's amendments add among others, that *"it is important to consider the international dimension of the development of antimicrobial resistance by taking non-discriminatory and proportionate measures, while respecting Union obligations under international agreement"*.

The [draft opinion](#) of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI Committee) of the European Parliament also highlights this international aspect.

Answer to a parliamentary question on the EU ban on routine farm use of antimicrobials

On 9 February 2021, Francisco GUERREIRO (Greens/EFA, Portugal) submitted a parliamentary [question](#) for written answer to the European Commission. In his question, the Member of the European Parliament (MEP) asked how the European Commission will help Member States and the livestock sector to be ready for the ban on routine farm use of antimicrobials on 28 January 2022. According to him, there are many obstacles that prevent them from achieving this goal, the goal of the [Regulation 2019/06](#) which prohibits the prophylactic use of antimicrobial, and the objective in the [Farm to Fork strategy](#) to reduce the antimicrobial sales by 50% in 2030.

In its [reply](#), on 14 April 2021, the European Commission states that the Regulation 2019/06 was published in 2019 and that Member States, livestock and veterinary sectors will have had three years to comply with it. Parallely, the Farm to Fork strategy is based on the past 10-years provisions (held by the European Surveillance of Veterinary Antimicrobial Consumption) and is relevant with the perspective of reducing the antimicrobial sales by 50% in 2030. In addition, the Commission reiterated that the new EU Regulations on [veterinary medicinal products](#) and [medicated feed](#) which provide for a wide range of measures to fight antimicrobial resistance and promote a responsible use of antimicrobials will apply in January 2022.

Update on EMA activities

Decisions of the Committee for Medicinal Products for Veterinary Use (CVMP)

The Committee for Medicinal Products for Veterinary Use (CVMP) held a [meeting](#) from 13 to 15 April 2021.

The Committee adopted positive opinions for type II variation applications concerning quality-related changes for Comfortis, Purevax Rabies, Purevax RCP FeLV, Purevax RCPCh, Purevax RCP, Purevax RCPCh FeLV, Versican Plus Pi/L4, Versican Plus Pi/L4R, Versican Plus L4, Versican Plus DHPPI/L4R and Versican Plus DHPPI/L4.

The Committee required that the product information in the PSURs for Galliprant, Kexxone and Simparica Trio need to be changed. On the contrary, the Committee approved the updated product information in the PSURs for Baycox Iron, Evalon, Gumbohatch, Oncept IL-2, Palladia, SevoFlo, Suvaxyn Circo MH RTU and Zeleris.

OTHER ISSUES

Latest news on the Veterinary profession

Latest update on the negotiations on the VAT reform in the EU

Portugal – which presides the Council until the end of June 2021 – proposed on 13 April a compromise paper (not published) to EU governments on the discussions to give Member States the freedom to set reduced, super-reduced and zero VAT rates.

In 2018, the European Commission presented a [legislative proposal](#) aiming to reform the system of VAT rates. The European Parliament adopted its [position](#) on this proposal. It is now currently under discussion in the Council and a unanimous decision by EU Member States is required for this proposal to be adopted.

The aim of the Commission’s proposal is to provide more flexibility to Member States in setting VAT rates, under certain safeguards that prevent distortions of competition. It should allow Member States to grant favorable VAT treatment to goods and services that cannot be subject to a reduced VAT rate at present, such as veterinary care of pets. However, the application of any VAT rate will remain a discretionary decision for each Member State to take.

The compromise of the Portuguese presidency proposes to maintain a positive list of products and services eligible for reduced rates, which exclude for instance products which are harmful to the environment.

The content of this list is currently being negotiated in the Council.

Latest news on animal health

Clarification from the European Commission on transitional arrangements for new animal health certificates

New health certificates are provided for in the “[animal health law](#)”, which entered into force on 21 April 2021.

However, a transition period is put in place, during which the use of the old forms remains possible.

In an [implementing regulation](#) published in the Official Journal of the EU on 16 April 2021, the Commission specifies the duration of this period: for imports from third countries, the current certificates will remain authorised until 20 October, provided they have been signed by the authorised person before 21 April 2021; as regards trade between European states, the transition period will end on 17 October 2021.

Positioning of stakeholders on the entry into force of the “Animal health law”

The organization Eurogroup for animals and the European Federation of Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA) released their positioning on the entry into force of the “[Animal health law](#)” on 21 April.

These organisations acknowledged the measures established by this new legislation, and among others:

- The new powers for the European Commission to mandate common minimum standards for the identification and registration of individual cats and dogs, and to facilitate information exchange between registration databases between Member States;
- The power given to the Commission to suspend or stop mink farming across the EU due to ongoing concerns over the transmission of Sars-Cov-2 variants in mink farms across the EU;
- The fact that breeders and transporters of pets have to register themselves across the EU;
- Clarified responsibilities for farmers, vets and others dealing with animals.

Scientific opinion of EFSA on the transmission of the African swine fever

On 27 April 2021, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a [scientific opinion](#) on the transmission of the African swine fever through feed, bedding materials and empty trucks returning from infected areas.

This study states that the risk of introducing swine fever is significantly low but *“is not to be excluded”*. EFSA recommends *“strict adherence to decontamination and storage processes”* for all products moved from virus-affected areas to non-infected locations.

Webinar by European Parliament’s Intergroup on animal welfare on the impacts of illegal animal trade

A webinar entitled *“Online platforms as facilitators of organised crime? Case study: Digital Services Act and illegal animal trade”* has been organized by the European Parliament’s intergroup on the welfare and conservation of animals on 21 April.

As a reminder, intergroups of the European Parliament gather some Members of the European Parliament interested in specific topics and allow them to informally discuss on these topics.

The speakers of this webinar were Jennifer Maher, Lecturer at the University of South Wales (UK), specialist in animal abuse issues; Paolo Zucca, manager of the Bio-Crime project which aims to combat the illegal pet trade in the cross-border region of northern Italy and southern Austria; and Georgia Diamantopoulou, EU Companion Animal Policy Coordinator of Four Paws.

In this webinar, speakers discussed among others the issues surrounding the online pet trade; the health issues surrounding the illegal trade of pet and wild animals; the current regulation of online platforms; and the issues pertaining to the regulation of animals’ trade in the Digital Services Act (DSA).

Paolo Zucca indicated some data related to the pet and wildlife trade, analysed over the period 2017-2021 at the Italian-Austrian border. In this period, 52.6% of pets and wild animals circulated without any identification papers, and less than 30% of puppies were vaccinated against rabies. According to Paolo Zucca, the illegal trade in pets (and wildlife) is one of the factors behind the emergence and resurgence of new pandemics.

On the entry into force of the [“animal health law”](#) on April 21, Georgia Diamantopoulou insisted that the registration of breeders and online sellers could go further than what this legislation provides, for instance to establish harmonised standards at European level on microchip identification and registration of pets. On this topic, according to Georgia Diamantopoulou, a European database could play a major role to check the validity of information submitted by sellers who wish to advertise animals online.

On the European “Digital Services Act” (DSA), Georgia Diamantopoulou explained how this legislation could improve the existing situation. The DSA has been [proposed](#) by the European Commission in December 2020 and it should regulate online services in the EU. This text is currently being negotiated in the European Parliament.

She said the legislation would provide a good framework for improving security in online commerce but is not ambitious enough. She proposed several measures to strengthen the DSA: dealing more effectively with the anonymity of sellers and extend its scope to include the illegal trade in pets; imposing an obligation to verify the seller's identification information as well as an obligation to verify the identification on the product (labelling/registration).

Positioning of Animal health Europe on animal vaccination

Whereas the new [EU Regulation on Transmissible Animal Diseases](#) is applicable across EU since 21 April, the animal health industry took this opportunity to support the importance of animal's vaccination for prevention and control of animal diseases. According to Animal health Europe, the European Commission seems to go on this direction too since it foresees a new delegated act in the Animal Health Law on the use of veterinary medicines for disease control, with a special emphasis on vaccines. It also plans other regulations on the management of vaccine banks and their use.

This legal development reflects the first step of a growing awareness of the importance of animal vaccination. According to a [survey](#) held by Animal health Europe in eight countries, 69% of the citizens agreed that farm animals should be vaccinated regularly.

Latest news on animal welfare

Study from the European Commission evaluating its 2012-2015 strategy on the protection and welfare of animals

The European Commission published on 31 March 2021 an [evaluation](#) of the EU [Strategy](#) for the Protection and Welfare of Animals from 2012 to 2015. This evaluation covers the years 2012 to 2018 – some actions of the 2012-2015 strategy having been continued until 2018 – and assesses in particular the effectiveness, efficiency and utility of the strategy.

The European Commission recalls in this study that the implementation of the strategy is primarily the responsibility of the EU Member States. The European Commission highlights that its role is to improve the implementation of legislation, and to stimulate and facilitate the work of the competent authorities in the Member States, in particular by carrying out audits of the Member States' initiatives.

Overall, the study highlights that the 2012-2015 strategy for the protection and welfare of animals has contributed to setting common priorities at EU level, which have led to improvements in animal welfare across the EU and has also contributed to improving knowledge and sharing of best practices on animal welfare. However, it is noted that none of the objectives of the strategy have been fully achieved, despite the fact that most of the planned actions have been implemented.

Among the shortcomings identified, the report indicates areas where improvements are still needed:

- improving compliance in all Member States in certain risk areas, including animal transport, routine tail docking in pigs and certain stunning methods;
- simplifying existing rules and improve their enforceability;
- improving the coherence of the strategy with regard to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and policies on fisheries, trade, environment and transport;
- continuing to improve consumer information on animal welfare.

It should be noted that the findings of the study will feed into the ongoing [evaluation](#) of animal welfare legislation. A public consultation on this review is planned for the first quarter of 2021.

According to the European Commission, the next review of animal welfare [legislation](#) will address the legislative gaps identified as early as 2012 and any new gaps that may emerge from the ongoing assessment of the current rules.

On April 26 during the Council meeting of Agriculture ministers, several Member States including Germany, France, the Scandinavian countries and the Czech Republic mentioned the need to review and harmonise the rules on animal transport or the introduction of animal welfare labelling for agricultural products. The review of EU animal welfare legislation is scheduled for 2023, which has been confirmed by European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides at this meeting.

EFSA launches a public consultation on animal transport conditions

From the 15th of April to the 10th of June, the European Food safety Authority (Efsa) invites stakeholders to give their opinion about animal transport conditions as part of the on-going discussions on the [Farm to Fork strategy](#).

The public consultation, [available online](#), should help Efsa to know if it has a good understanding of the stakeholders' concerns on this issue. It also wants to identify what are the obstacles to comply with the legislation on animal welfare.

Latest developments on the European citizen initiative calling for an end to cage farming

A hearing took place on 15 April at the European Parliament on the European citizens' initiative entitled "End the cage Age" whose aim is to end the "*inhumane treatment of farm animals*" in cages by 2027.

It should be noted that citizen initiatives allow petitions that reach the one million signatures threshold in the EU to be discussed by the European Commission, which can then decide to propose (or not) legislative or non-legislative initiatives. The citizens' initiative "End the cage Age" reached 1.4 million signatures from more than 18 member states. Therefore, the campaigners for the "End of cage age" are now waiting for the Commission's response.

At the hearing of April 15, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides admitted that there are "*alternatives*" to cage farming and said the issue would be addressed when the Commission will propose a review of animal welfare legislation in 2023.

Some of the reactions from Members of the European Parliament (MEP) to this initiative were the following:

- Norbert Lins (EPP, Germany) – chair of the committee on agriculture and rural development (AGRI committee) and Ulrike Müller (Renew, Germany), highlighted the costs incurred by farmers in making these changes;
- Peter Jahr (EPP, Germany), asked to address the problem of imports from third countries that do not meet high animal welfare standards;
- Herbert Dorfmann (EPP, Italy) called for a sufficient transitional period to adapt to the new rules.

In addition, a [study](#) on this citizens' initiative commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs has been published on 12 April. This study proposed a series of policy recommendations which include financial measures to support farmers; proposing a ban on furnished cages for hens; and a transition away from farrowing crates for sows.

The European Commission [plans](#) to present a communication (non-binding measure) in the second quarter of 2021 to explain the actions it will propose to reply to the citizens' initiative. In addition, a public consultation should be launched by the Commission in the third quarter of 2021 on this topic.

It should be noted that the European Food Safety Authority (Efsa) is currently working on a series of reports on the subject, which should be published between June 2022 and early 2023.

Based on the information gathered, animal welfare [legislation](#) will be revised by the end of 2023.

Opinion of the European Parliament's Environment Committee on the implementation report on on-farm animal welfare

On 16 April, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI Committee) of the European Parliament released the [opinion](#) on the implementation report on on-farm animal welfare prepared by Marlene Mortler (EPP, Germany). This opinion will be added to the report on the subject drafted by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI Committee) of the European Parliament.

In its opinion, the ENVI Committee underlines several initiatives which aims at improving animal welfare but remains rather general in its suggestions:

- It *“welcomes the fact that the common agricultural policy (CAP) seeks to enhance the welfare of on-farm animals by providing financial incentives and by focusing on the enforcement of animal welfare legislation”* and *“calls on the Member States to offer greater and effective support to farmers who voluntarily comply with more stringent animal welfare requirements”*;
- It *“points out that individual management practices often have a greater influence on animal welfare than rules alone”* and *“calls on the Commission to adopt a more output-oriented approach to future project”*;
- It *“stresses the importance of regular exchanges with representatives of national authorities, agricultural stakeholder organisations and experts concerning examples of good practice and possible improvements in the area of animal welfare”*.

The AGRI Committee, which is the European Parliament's committee responsible on this report, should publish its report in the upcoming months.

It should be noted that once adopted, this report is expected to represent the European Parliament's political position on this topic.

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