

## Animal welfare - a growing concern

**There is a high awareness of animal welfare in the EU, but are consumers prepared to pay a higher price for "animal friendly products"? This was one of the topics discussed in a hearing organised by the Parliament's Agriculture committee on the EU action plan for animal welfare 2006-2010.**

The new Action Plan aims to ensure that animal welfare is addressed in the most effective manner possible. In all EU sectors and through EU relations with third countries and according to the Protocol on Protection and Welfare of Animals of the Amsterdam Treaty, which recognises that animals are sentient beings.

### Animal welfare is a European value...

Speakers agreed that animal welfare is a European value, strongly linked to other policy areas. The EU already has high standards, but "a lot more can be done", said German Christian Democrat Elisabeth Jeggle who is drawing up a report on the action plan.

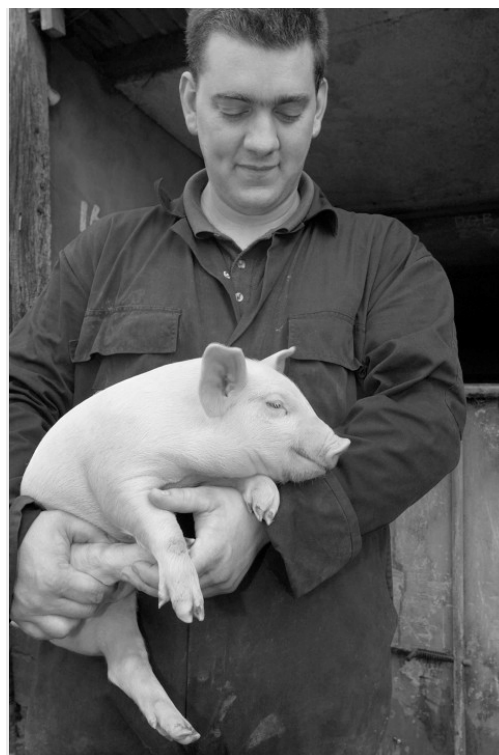
A Eurobarometer survey of 24,708 Europeans last year showed that in 15 of the 25 Member States, a majority of respondents thinks that not enough importance is given to the welfare of animals in the agricultural policy of their own countries. The survey shows a distinct perception of welfare and protection for each species of farmed animal. The conditions of laying hens being judged to be poorer than those of pigs and cows **...but are we prepared to pay?**

In spite of the awareness of animal welfare, a majority of citizens do not seem to take it into account when buying food, and people seem willing to accept only a limited price increase. According to Spanish academic Luis Gosálvez Lara only 11% are prepared to accept a greater than 25% increase in meat prices.

The demand for welfare-friendly products is however strong and growing, said Dil Peeling of the Eurogroup for Animal Welfare. He referred to a study by the National Food Centre from 2000 showing that a third of the population in Ireland, the UK, France, Italy and Germany had decreased meat consumption due to animal welfare concerns. The consumption of welfare friendly eggs is about two and half times higher than it was 10 years ago, and rising, he said.

Identification difficulties may explain a lack of sensitivity, so clearer labelling could be an important measure, said several speakers. Some 51% of EU citizens say that they can rarely or never identify from the label on eggs, milk and meat whether the production system is animal welfare friendly or not.

Summing up the debate, Joseph DAUL (EPP-ED, FR), chairman of the EP agriculture committee, underlined that animal welfare also applies to pets. He called for studies on the socio-economic impact of new rules and respect of geographical differences when setting standards. Better animal welfare animals should not mean higher costs and red-tape.



*Animal welfare is a European value*