EU srategy for the protection and welfare of animals 2012-2015

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PURPOSE : to present a European Union Strategy for the protection and welfare of animals for the period 2012-2015.

BACKGROUND : in recent years, the Union has dedicated on average **nearly EUR 70 million per year to support animal welfare,** of which 71% is directed to farmers as animal welfare payments from the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development.

The Community Action Plan on the protection and welfare of animals 2006-2010, adopted by the Commission, grouped the various aspects of EU policy on animal welfare governing the keeping of billions of animals for economic purposes in the EU.

A horizontal directive (Directive 98/58/EC) covers the different aspects of the welfare of farmed animal. Specific aspects are covered by EU legislation on transport and slaughter. Specific EU requirements apply to the keeping of calves, pigs, laying hens and broilers. Animals used for experimentation are also subject to specific rules on animal welfare.

Yet, over the years **it has become increasingly clear that simply applying the same sector specific rules to animal welfare does not always yield the desired results.** Problems of compliance to sector specific rules point the need to reflect on whether a **"one size fits all"** approach can lead to better welfare outcomes across the Union.

The following factors have been identified as the main common drivers affecting the welfare status of animals in the Union:

- lack of enforcement of EU legislation by the Member States is still common in a number of areas;
- consumers lack appropriate information on animal welfare aspects;
- many stakeholders lack sufficient knowledge about animal welfare;
- lastly, there is a need to simplify and develop clear principles for animal welfare.

The present Communication builds on the experience gained through the 2006-2010 Action Plan **to propose lines of EU action for the next four years** taking advantage of the scientific and technological advances made to reconcile animal welfare with economic realities in implementing existing legal provisions. This strategy is a continuation of the Action Plan as recommended by most stakeholders consulted and by the European Parliament.

CONTENT : this strategy is based on **two complementary approaches**:

1°) some common problems need to be tackled in a different and holistic manner through the establishment of general principles in a consolidated revised EU legislative framework. The Commission will consider the feasibility of introducing **a simplified EU legislative framework** with animal welfare principles for all animals kept in the context of an economic activity including where

appropriate pet animals, with a specific attention on simplification, reduction of administrative burden and the valorisation of welfare standards as a means to enhance competitiveness of EU food industry including the value added potential of animal welfare standards.

It would consider:

- the use of science-based animal welfare indicators as a possible means to simplify the legal framework and allow flexibility to improve competitiveness of livestock producers;

- a new EU framework to increase transparency and adequacy of information to consumers on animal welfare for their purchase choice;

- the establishment of a European network of reference centres;

- the creation of common requirements for competence of personnel handling animals.

2°) It is necessary to reinforce or better use certain measures already taken by the Commission. Accordingly, in addition to the simplified legislative framework envisaged, the Commission proposes the following:

Developing tools, including where relevant implementing plans, to strengthen Member States' compliance: the Commission will address the **issue of compliance** as a matter of priority, since compliance can only be achieved through actions of enforcement performed by or under the responsibility of the Member States. However, the Commission has an important role to play in ensuring that compliance is met in a uniform manner in the EU. It is essential to ensure that **equal conditions** apply to all EU producers and to ensure that animals are treated in a proper way.

Support international cooperation: a **level playing field on animal welfare is important at international level** to ensure global competitiveness of EU operators. For that purpose the Commission will: (i) continue to include animal welfare in bilateral trade agreements or cooperation forums to increase the strategic opportunities for developing more concrete cooperation with third countries; (ii) remain active in the multilateral arena, especially at the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Provide consumers and the public with appropriate information: it is important to inform EU consumers about the EU legislation applicable to food producing animals and to ensure that they are not deceived by **misleading animal welfare claims**. Many **communication and education activities** already exist in Member States. Comprehensive mapping of the EU situation would permit the identification of the gaps where the Union could provide an added value.

The Commission therefore intends first to launch a study to map out the current animal welfare education and information activities directed at the general public and consumers. Such actions could include the possibility of **granting funds for successful trans-national information campaigns** or educational initiatives on animal welfare.

Optimise synergies with the Common Agriculture Policy: the Commission will establish a specific inter-services arrangement to assess how to optimise synergistic effects of the current mechanisms of the CAP in particular through cross-compliance, rural development, promotional measures, quality policy, organic farming, etc.

Investigate the welfare of farmed fish: farmed fish are covered by the scope of the EU legislation on the protection of animals during transport and at the time of killing, without specific rules for them. The

Commission will continue to seek scientific advice on a species by species basis and evaluate fish welfare issues in aquaculture in order to take appropriate action on the basis of the outcome of that evaluation.