

Protection of chickens kept for meat production

2005/0099(CNS) - 10/06/2005 - Document attached to the procedure

COMMISSION'S IMPACT ASSESSMENT

For further information concerning the background to this issue, please refer to the summary of the Commission's initial proposal COM(2005)0221 of 30 May 2005 concerning a proposal to lay down minimum rules for the protection of chickens kept for meat production.

1- POLICY OPTIONS AND IMPACTS : The Commission's impact assessment looked at the three policy options that follow:

1.1- Option 1 - Take no action: To maintain the *status quo* and take no action would not respond to the serious animal welfare problems identified in the rearing of chickens for meat production. It would also not meet the expectations of Member States and stakeholders including industry, NGOs and consumers to improve the welfare of these animals. At the same time the industry would prefer a better harmonisation at European level to avoid market disturbances due to diverging national legislation and voluntary quality assurance schemes at national level imposed by retailers and consumer demand.

1.2- Option 2 -Establish minimum animal welfare requirements for the production of chickens prescribing a detailed description of equipment and housing to be used in chicken farming: This option could fulfil the public expectations with regard to the welfare of chickens. However, a very strict regulation of technical details of the farming methods applied could lack the necessary flexibility with regard to the variety of farming systems applied. The development of more efficient and welfare friendly farming practices requires a legislative framework that offers sufficient flexibility. Legislation that regulates too many technical details risks hindering the ongoing technical evolution of the sector.

1.3- Option 3 - Integrated approach: Harmonisation of technical requirements concerning key factors for the welfare of chickens in combination with an indicator-based monitoring of the flocks after slaughter integrated in the post-mortem inspection for the most intensive production.

In an industry as competitive as the chicken meat industry, even small price differentials can have important competitive implications. On the other hand, in most Member States animal welfare is an issue of increasing public importance leading to an effect on the product demand. On the basis of various socio-economic considerations, the Commission concluded that adopting a step-by-step approach to implement the main aspects of the recommendations represents the best means to achieve real improvements of the welfare of the animals over the short to medium term.

CONCLUSION: The output-oriented approach chosen by the Commission, Option 3, which defines maximum levels for mortality and pathologies, enables farmers to choose the most cost-efficient solutions to reach the welfare targets, tailor-made for their situation.

IMPACT: While many sectors of the industry would accept the labelling of chicken meat products as being of EU origin and complying with EU animal welfare rules, some NGOs have expressed their concern that products should not be differentiated solely on the basis of their origin but rather on their compliance with higher animal welfare standards. Further clarification and investigations are needed on the possible socio/economic and trade/legal implications of such mandatory labelling schemes, notably with regard to compatibility with WTO rules, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) etc. NGOs are concerned

that standardised labelling could disadvantage niche products presently marketed which are complying with animal welfare standards above the standards proposed by the Commission. Difficulties also exist associated with the specific labelling of chicken meat used in processed/cooked products.

2- FOLLOW-UP: Due to the very different housing and husbandry systems involved in broiler breeding flocks compared to those for chickens kept for meat production it is not feasible to address these two systems in the context of a single proposal. The intention is to address the issue of broiler breeders in a second step based on future scientific advice and experience gained in implementing the current proposal once adopted, including the collection of specific data by the Member States. It should be noted that a Community-funded DG RTD project on this issue is currently being finalised and will provide an important input to future actions. It is also intended to request the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to issue a future scientific opinion on the specific issue of broiler breeders.

The Commission intends to submit a detailed report to the Council on this issue having undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the considerations in question. This report on the possibility of a possible specific mandatory labelling regime at Community level for chicken meat based on compliance with animal welfare standards will be prepared taking into account, but without prejudice to, existing voluntary schemes for the labelling of chicken meat. The report will take into account possible socio-economic implications, effects on the Community's economic partners and compliance of such a labelling regime with World Trade Organization rules.