

The protection and welfare of animals for 2006-2010

2006/2046(INI) - 23/01/2006 - Document attached to the procedure

This Commission working document presents a Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals for 2006-2010. Five actions are being proposed:

Action 1: Upgrading existing minimum standards for animal protection and welfare.

Animal welfare has always featured large in the formulation of Community policies. Indeed, the “*Protocol on Protection and Welfare of Animals*”, which is annexed to the EC Treaty sets out key fields of action and obliges the Community, as well as the Member States, to take account of the welfare of animals when formulating policy options. Given the importance that consumers attach to animal welfare issues it is important that related agricultural regulations adapt to this trend. Within the context of recent CAP reforms, the Commission suggests that more account be taken of animal welfare issues, through the introduction of more animal welfare instruments.

Action 2: Supporting future research on animal protection and applying the 3Rs principle (replacement, reduction and refinement).

The European Commission has, in the past, supported a number of research projects examining the issue of farm animal welfare. The 7th research programme is currently under preparation but includes a number of animal welfare priorities under theme 2 “Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology”. The 3R’s activities will be supported in four out of the nine thematic priorities namely: 1) health, food, agriculture and biotechnology; 4) nanosciences, nanotechnologies, materials and new production technologies and 6) Environment. In other measures, the action programme foresees supporting a “European Centre or Laboratory for the protection and welfare of animals”; applying new practical tools to ensure animal welfare and the application of the 3R’s principle for animal experimentation. As far as the latter point is concerned, the Commission points to the “Declaration of Brussels”, which was supported by the Commission and industry alike. The Declaration sets up a task force of stakeholders. This taskforce will seek to find appropriate solution for the promotion of alternative approaches to animal testing including: the mapping of research activities; research co-operation; the development of alternative approaches; practical mechanisms to improve the validation process using available knowledge and practical mechanisms to facilitate the regulatory acceptance of alternative approaches.

Action 3: Introducing standardised animal welfare indicators

Under this action the Commission envisages the creation of an “EU label for animal welfare. Retailers and producers are beginning to recognise the importance of animal welfare. The creation of an EU label for animal welfare is an option worth exploring. A clear label identifying the level of welfare applied could represent an effective marketing tool similar to the identification of certain agricultural products with regional specialisations. The system would need to be based on standardised scientific indicators and supported by sound scientific research.

Action 4: Ensuring that animal handlers, as well as the public, are more involved and informed of current standards of animal protection and welfare.

There has been a clear shift of public attitudes towards animals in recent decades. European consumers provide a good example and many are increasingly focusing on clean and green production methods. The

mindset of both consumers and producers has undergone a seismic shift, from merely preventing the cruelty and avoidable suffering of animals, to focusing on their wellbeing. The action plan, under this heading, seeks to define a communication strategy on animal welfare and protection issues. Consideration will be given to the establishment of a specific “Information Platform” on animal welfare in order to nurture further dialogue and exchange experiences.

Action 5: To support and initiate further international initiatives; to raise awareness; and to create a consensus on animal welfare.

At present there is limited international consensus on the relative importance accorded to animal welfare and EU measures can not easily be compared to standards in third-countries. To tackle this challenge, the Action Programme will allow for close collaboration with the World Organisation for Animal Health OIE. It will also: promote animal welfare in the EU’s multilateral and bilateral relationships and raise knowledge on animal welfare issues in developing countries.