

# Scientific Advisory Board on Agricultural Policy

at the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture  
and Consumer Protection

## Brief opinion



Introduction of an  
**animal welfare label**  
in Germany



March 2011

# **Brief opinion on the introduction of an animal welfare label in Germany<sup>1</sup>**

SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD ON AGRICULTURAL POLICY AT THE FEDERAL MINISTRY OF FOOD,  
AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION (BMELV)  
Berlin, March 2011

## **Preliminary Remarks**

One element of the current discussion on the future of livestock husbandry is the introduction of a voluntary animal welfare label to mark products which are produced in compliance with strict animal welfare requirements. Corresponding proposals are a reaction to the discrepancy between the expectations of many consumers with regard to the implementation of animal-welfare related measures and the actual animal welfare services provided in practice. A labelling system is intended to enable consumers to recognise products that have been produced in a way that fully satisfies animal welfare requirements. On the other hand, the purpose of a labelling scheme is also to enable producers to credibly communicate higher animal welfare standards and to compensate for higher production costs through higher prices.

The BMELV supports this initiative made at EU level. The industry is also stepping up efforts to take into account consumer wishes with regard to animal welfare. And yet many representatives from agriculture, the food trade and food industry are reserved in their attitude towards this issue or indeed oppose it.

The Scientific Advisory Board welcomes and supports the efforts aimed at incorporating animal welfare into livestock husbandry to a greater extent. The Scientific Advisory Council gives the following recommendations based on its expert opinion on “The future of livestock husbandry” from 2005 and taking into account its current deliberations on food labelling:

## **Recommendations of the Advisory Council**

The objective of animal welfare is to create an environment for livestock husbandry and livestock care which ensures that the livestock are for the most part free of pain, suffering and damage and thus creates the conditions for their wellbeing. A high degree of animal welfare in livestock husbandry is founded on a high animal health status and on animals being able to a great extent to exercise their species-specific behaviour. From a scientific perspective, however, there are significant differences between measures aimed at promoting the ability to exercise species-specific behaviour and measures aimed at reducing the risk of disease or promoting health, in respect of both technical approaches and the methodological assessment. This fact must be taken into account when conducting assessments. Comprehensive sets of criteria for the

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<sup>1</sup> The Brief opinion can be downloaded from the internet at  
<http://www.bmelv.de/SharedDocs/Standardartikel/EN/Ministry/ScientificAdvisoryBoards/AgriculturalPolicyPublications.html>

assessment of animal welfare have been developed and validated in recent years which make it possible to assess the status both at the level of individual animals and at farm level.

The approach of using an animal welfare label to foster animal welfare in livestock husbandry should take into account the following aspects:

**a) Need for government action and a pioneering national solution:**

- An increasing number of private labels advertising higher animal welfare standards are appearing on the market. Following the experiences made with the development of the organic market, it is necessary to regulate process quality as otherwise there will be a proliferation of terms in use, which will confuse consumers and prevent market transparency. It is necessary for the legislator to define the relevant terms and the related animal welfare services to counter such a development. As a uniform European solution is not to be expected in the near future, efforts should be undertaken to aim at a pioneering national solution in order to harness the current dynamism of the public debate, to create choices for consumers through a voluntary labelling system and to open up new markets with greater value-added potential for producers.
- In view of the many special interests in the food sector and the resulting conflicts of interest, the Federal Government faces the challenges of reaching a broad consensus with the stakeholders involved regarding the number of, and differentiation between, the categories of animal welfare standards. In line with the organisation of the “Blauer Engel”, the standards could be developed in a semi-public process.
- Risk-oriented controls of farms and certifications, and controls/assessment of the controls by independent bodies should ensure that the system requirements are complied with in order to counter distortions of competition and a possible loss of confidence.

**b) Evaluation on the basis of scientific methods:**

- Evaluating animal welfare as a process quality requires comprehensive and regular monitoring on agricultural holdings, during livestock transport and in abattoirs. A variety of indicators that pay equal regard to aspects of husbandry, management, animal behaviour and animal health should be applied based on the current state of research and with a view to having an integrative procedure.
- Having a high standard of animal welfare (as indicated by a significant reduction of morbidity rates and a range of possibilities for animals to exercise their species-specific behaviour) is an achievement of the overall farm system. That is why reliable statements can only be made via an animal welfare labelling system in the overall context of a holding and taking into account the entire process chain (from genetics via breeding to slaughtering). To continue the argumentation put forward in the expert opinion on the future of livestock husbandry, the assessment must focus on animal-related indicators. As a rule, in order to allow for a scientifically robust and comprehensive assessment, it is not

usually sufficient to limit the assessment to individual aspects (e.g. abolishing castration of piglets).

**c) Creating lasting incentives with a multi-stage label:**

- Since holdings vary greatly with respect to their animal welfare performance, it would make sense to differentiate on the basis of multi-stage categories (e.g. a star system akin to hotel classifications) in order to account for existing differences and to create incentives for holdings to continuously improve animal welfare.

**d) Promoting accompanying measures:**

- During the introductory phase, the government should use incentive programmes to support a monitoring system in order to help improve the recording and documentation of the animals' health status (e.g. through diagnostic findings on carcasses), return the relevant information to the farmers and improve knowledge of cause-and-effect relationships. The incentive programmes under the second pillar should be used to give farmers financial incentives to participate in monitoring programmes and provide supplementary farm data.
- Agricultural policy should intensively support and assess the market introduction phase of an animal welfare label. A broad information campaign should provide livestock keepers and the general public with comprehensive information on the animal welfare label in order to improve market transparency.

## **Conclusions**

The Advisory Board calls for a strict animal welfare and consumer protection policy which ensures that animal welfare is assessed on the basis of scientific methods, thus making it possible to assign holdings to different animal welfare categories on a voluntary basis. An animal welfare label should be geared towards achieving a sustainable improvement of animal welfare in the production of products of animal origin. Establishing indicators and categories should create transparency while risk-oriented controls should counter possible distortions of competition. Moreover, accompanying measures during the introductory phase should promote market penetration. Under these conditions, the Advisory Council considers the animal welfare label to be a suitable instrument to improve the animal welfare situation in livestock husbandry, to account for consumer wishes and to create better conditions of competition for producers wanting to bring their production into line with animal welfare criteria.

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### **Publications of the Scientific Advisory Board on Agricultural Policy<sup>3</sup>**

- Brief opinion on the Commission Communication on the Common Agricultural Policy towards 2020, January 2011

#### **The following documents are abstracts:**

- The coexistence of genetic engineering in the food and agricultural sectors - Excerpt from the report delivered by the Scientific Advisory Board on Agricultural Policy, June 2010
- EU agricultural policy after 2013 - Plea for a new policy for food, agriculture and rural areas
- Preparing for the CAP Health Check - Position Paper by the Scientific Advisory Board for Agricultural Policy adopted on 28 March 2008
- Use of biomass for energy generation - Recommendations to policy makers, November 2007,
- Further development of the policy for rural areas - Recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Board for Agricultural Policy adopted in October 2006,
- Position Paper on Current Issues Concerning EU Finances and the EU Agricultural Budget Approved on 25. November 2005,
- The future of livestock production in Germany - Opinion provided by the Scientific Advisory Board on Agricultural Policy on 31 January 2005.

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<sup>3</sup> To view the unabridged German versions of all expertises and statements by the Scientific Advisory Board on Agricultural Policy  
<http://www.bmelv.de/SharedDocs/Standardartikel/Ministerium/Organisation/Beiraete/AgrVeroeffentlichungen.html>