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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

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Subject: Council Conclusions on an EU-wide animal welfare label

Delegations will find in annex the text of the Council Conclusions on an EU-wide animal welfare label, as approved by the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 15 December 2020.

Council Conclusions on an EU-wide animal welfare label**WHEREAS**

- (1) The welfare of animals is an issue of high importance to European citizens and has been recognised as such by Union law, in particular Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (EU).
- (2) In 2007, the Council recognised in its *Conclusions following the Conference "Animal Welfare – Improving by Labelling?"*¹ that consumers could appreciate information on the animal welfare conditions under which products of animal origin are obtained, thereby enabling them to favour higher animal welfare standards through their purchasing decisions. It further underlined that animal welfare labelling could allow producers to capitalise on high animal welfare standards and invited the Commission to submit a report on the subject. The Commission's report² agreed with the Council in that animal welfare labelling, based on sound scientific knowledge and assessed on the basis of harmonised requirements, could enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions and make it possible for producers to benefit from market opportunities.
- (3) In 2012, the Commission announced in its *Communication on the European Union Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2012-2015*³ that it would consider a new EU framework to increase transparency and adequacy of information to consumers on animal welfare for their purchase choice. In this respect, specific attention was assigned to the valorisation of animal welfare standards as a means to enhance the competitiveness of the EU food industry.

1 9151/07
2 15307/09

3 https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/animals/docs/aw_eu_strategy_19012012_en.pdf

- (4) Eurobarometer revealed in 2015⁴ that 82% of Europeans considered that the welfare of farmed animals should be better protected and that 52% looked for animal welfare labels when buying products. According to Eurobarometer, in 2018⁵, the emphasis of public opinion shifted from ensuring food supply to focus on, *inter alia*, animal welfare.
- (5) In its *Conclusions on animal welfare - an integral part of sustainable animal production* approved end of 2019⁶, the Council invited the Commission to assess the need for and impact of an EU regulatory framework with criteria for animal welfare labelling schemes taking into account national experience.
- (6) Early 2020, there have been calls in Council for further action on animal welfare labelling, with certain Member States highlighting the need for a framework on an EU-wide animal welfare label for food having been produced according to animal welfare standards exceeding the minimum legal requirements⁷.
- (7) In its *Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system* adopted on 20 May 2020, the Commission announced that it would consider options for animal welfare labelling to better transmit value through the food chain. In its *Conclusions on the Farm to Fork Strategy* approved on 19 October 2020⁸, the Council reiterated its invitation to the Commission to assess the impact of an EU regulatory framework with criteria for an animal welfare labelling scheme.
- (8) At the meeting of the EU Platform on Animal Welfare on 15 June 2020, the Commission announced that a subgroup dedicated to animal welfare labelling would be created. The subgroup held its first meeting on 27 October 2020.

⁴ https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2096_84_4_442_ENG

⁵ https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2161_88_4_473_ENG

⁶ 14975/19

⁷ Session of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 27 January 2020 (doc. 5556/20)

⁸ 12099/20

The Council of the European Union

- (1) **DRAWS ATTENTION** to point 9 of its *Conclusions on the Farm to Fork Strategy* which stresses the fact that animal health and welfare are a precondition for sustainable livestock production;
- (2) **RECALLS** the already high animal welfare legal requirements applicable in the EU and **CONSIDERS** important to enable consumers to recognise food produced according to these requirements;
- (3) **TAKES NOTE** of the ongoing discussions in the EU and its Member States on the further improvement of animal welfare and **EMPHASISES** that it is necessary to respond to consumer demands for an improved well-being of farmed animals;
- (4) **DRAWS ATTENTION** to existing initiatives in the Member States, in particular to the already successfully established voluntary animal welfare labels in some of them;
- (5) **WELCOMES** the Commission's announcement in its communication on the *Farm to Fork Strategy*, that it will consider options for animal welfare labelling to better transmit value through the food chain;
- (6) **STRESSES** that the overall purpose of an EU-wide animal welfare label should be to improve animal welfare for as many food producing animals as possible;
- (7) **RECALLS** its *Conclusions on the Farm to Fork Strategy*, where it invited the Commission to assess the impact of an EU regulatory framework with criteria for an animal welfare labelling scheme which would contribute to enhanced animal welfare, greater market transparency, better consumer choice and fairer compensation for livestock under higher animal welfare levels, as well as a level playing field, and pointed out that national experience should be taken into account and additional administrative burden reduced as much as possible;

- (8) **WELCOMES** in this context the establishment of a sub group on “Animal Welfare Labelling” within the framework of the EU Platform on Animal Welfare, which is tasked with identifying and analysing already existing certification schemes with animal welfare attributes and assessing their contribution to the welfare of animals, as well as the launch by the Commission of an external study on animal welfare labelling early 2021;
- (9) **IS OF THE OPINION** that an EU-wide animal welfare label for food produced under animal welfare standards higher than those provided by EU legislation could respond to the consumer demand to easily recognise such food;
- (10) **STRESSES** that such a label, in order to further improve animal welfare in the EU, should allow for market recognition and better remuneration of the additional efforts made by producers, in particular farmers;
- (11) **UNDERLINES** the importance of consumer information and education campaigns on animal welfare and related EU standards, in particular when introducing the EU-wide harmonised animal welfare label;
- (12) **INVITES** the Commission to consider the following aspects before submitting the corresponding proposal:
- (a) the development of a tiered transparent labelling scheme allowing for sufficient incentives for producers to improve animal welfare;
 - (b) the development of EU-wide harmonised relevant, measurable and verifiable criteria that:
 - go beyond current EU legal requirements on animal welfare,
 - take into account Member States' geographical and climatic specificities and include criteria achievable by all of them, and
 - would have to be at least fulfilled in order to be able to use the EU animal welfare label and the protected terms;

- (c) that such a label should not disadvantage Member States that have animal welfare legislation in place which is stricter than current EU legal requirements;
 - (d) the gradual inclusion of all livestock species, covering their entire lifetime, including transport and slaughter, and giving due consideration to all their living conditions; priority should be given to species for which EU legal requirements on animal welfare have already been set;
 - (e) the creation of a standardised EU logo and the determination of easily understandable protected terms;
 - (f) the animal welfare provisions laid down in Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on organic production and labelling of organic products⁹ and in Regulation (EU) 1308/2013 on the common organisation of the markets in agricultural products¹⁰, and their adequate integration in an EU-wide animal welfare label, where relevant;
 - (g) the interplay between the existing national and the EU-wide animal welfare labels;
 - (h) the possible administrative burden related to the EU-wide animal welfare label.
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⁹ Regulation (EU) 2018/848 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 (OJ L 150, 14.6.2018, p. 1–92)

¹⁰ Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products and repealing Council Regulations (EEC) No 922/72, (EEC) No 234/79, (EC) No 1037/2001 and (EC) No 1234/2007 (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 671–854)