

Innovation, Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI



# Animal welfare and innovation

Animal welfare has become an important issue within the European Union. The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) entitled 'End the cage age', which was submitted to the European Commission in October 2020, gathered more than a million statements of support. In response to this initiative, the Commission made a commitment to revise the existing animal welfare legislation in order to phase out and finally prohibit the use of cages for all the animal species and categories referred to in the initiative. This includes laying hens, sows, calves, rabbits, pullets, broiler breeders, layer breeders, quail, ducks and geese. Within the scope of the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Commission announced that it would look at options for animal welfare labelling and propose a sustainable food-labelling framework. In response to animal welfare needs, EU Member States will need to invest significant resources to actively support the transition to cage-free management and to promote innovation and the exchange of good practices for more animal-friendly production systems.

The focus of the EU CAP Network workshop entitled 'Animal welfare and innovation' was on exchanging innovative practices and practical knowledge on animal welfare, especially on:

- › Cage-free production systems
- › Animal welfare indicators and monitoring methods for practical use on the farm
- › Meeting societal demands: Animal welfare labelling and certification

Many farmers are concerned about the high levels of investment that are needed, the length of the transition period to cage-free housing systems as well as the lack of staff experience and capacity to manage cage-free systems. The current circumstances related to the instability of farmers' income and the uncertainty about consumers' willingness to pay for increased animal welfare add a further layer of uncertainty. Proposed solutions include sharing effective and affordable best practices, and genetic strains and breeds of some species. For animal welfare indicators and monitoring methods, the lack of a harmonised system for monitoring animal welfare across EU Member States was raised as a major challenge for all stakeholders. Considerable interest was expressed in existing and new indicators of positive welfare, reflecting the animal's emotional state through the evaluation of behavioural patterns. Major challenges in terms of developing and utilising animal-based indicators were related to the need for human and economic resources to validate them and to train assessors/auditors. Digital tools can be useful for monitoring animal welfare, farm performance and productivity.

Participants clearly pointed out the importance of animal welfare labelling and certification in the EU market as an economic driver to facilitate change to more animal-friendly livestock systems. Attendees also recognised the existence of too many different animal welfare certification and labelling schemes in the EU market, leading to misunderstanding and confusion for consumers. Social media and education, starting from childhood, were recommended to align consumers' attitudes with informed purchasing.

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*"Improving mutual understanding between farmers and consumers will enable farmers to better meet consumer expectations and market demands for more animal-friendly food, and it will make them keener to improve animal welfare on the farm."*

**Paolo Ferrari (Italy),**

Coordinating Expert at the EU CAP Network Workshop 'Animal Welfare and Innovation'

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## Animal welfare and innovation

### Knowledge gaps and research needs

- › The need for a more holistic approach, including synergies and trade-offs between animal welfare and environmental impacts;
- › Sensors and AI for monitoring animal welfare, and the use of deep learning for video analysis of behaviour;
- › **Indicators and monitoring methods:** Monitoring welfare and productivity, investigating their links with farm profitability and the development of new indicators of 'positive welfare';
- › **Cage-free production systems:** More adaptive and resilient genotypes under different systems, a cost/benefit analysis with regard to the renovation of existing facilities and building new facilities, effective solutions to control parasites and predation in cage-free/outdoor systems;
- › Standardisation of welfare labelling and certification.

### Operational Groups working on the workshop topic

- › [Data driven farming](#)
- › [Development of short pork supply chain](#)
- › [Motion pens for farrowing sows in agricultural production systems](#)
- › [MAVAS - Biosensor development for the detection of mastitis](#)

### H2020/Europe projects working on the workshop topic

- › **Clearfarm** - Co-designed Welfare Monitoring Platform for Pig and Dairy Cattle: [CORDIS](#) (2019-2023; €6M)
- › **EuroSheep** - European Network for interactive and innovative knowledge exchange on animal health and nutrition between the sheep industry actors and stakeholders: [CORDIS](#) (01/2020-12/2022)
- › **PPILOW** - Poultry and Pig Low-input and Organic production systems' Welfare: [Website](#) (09/2019-08/2024)
- › **TechCare** - Integrating innovative technologies along the value chain to improve small ruminant welfare management: [Website](#) (09/2020-08/2024)
- › **EU PiG** - EU Pig Innovation Group: [Website](#) - [CORDIS](#) - [Videos on pig health & welfare](#) (11/2016-10/2020)
- › **aWISH** - Animal Welfare Indicators at the Slaughterhouse: [Website](#) (11/2022-2026)

### More information

- › EU CAP Network workshop entitled 'Animal welfare and innovation' - [Final report](#) | [Agenda and presentations](#) |

### Inspirational ideas

- › [Cage-free systems for laying hens](#) (Portugal)
- › [The use of the Welfare Quality protocol as implemented by the WelFair certification: Indicators and monitoring methods for practical use on the farm](#) (Spain)
- › [Fokus Tierwohl - A nationwide network to impart knowledge on animal welfare](#) (Germany)
- › [EIP-AGRI challenge: animal welfare and innovation](#)
- › [Video 'EIP-AGRI Challenge: Animal welfare and innovation'](#)
- › [Improving welfare for cows...and farmers](#) (Denmark)
- › [Concrete solutions for sustainability and animal welfare \(the Netherlands\)](#)
- › [Smart barn makes for happy pigs](#) (Operational Group from the Netherlands)
- › [A national network for animal welfare in Germany](#) (Germany)
- › [Organic experimental farm in Finland testing methods for improved animal welfare](#) (Finland)

### Publications

- › [Communication from the Commission on the European Citizens' Initiative \(ECI\) 'End the Cage Age'](#)
- › [Platform on animal welfare - Conclusions of the animal welfare subgroups of the EU Animal Welfare Platform](#)
- › ['Smart Barn makes for happy pigs' - Innovative barn infrastructure and real-time monitoring to improve animal welfare and reduce ammonia emissions](#)

### Feedback and questions:

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