

ANIMAL WELFARE AND LABELLING SCHEMES IN THE EU



Different **food labelling schemes** co-exist in the EU food market to inform and reassure customers about different quality characteristics of food products. **There is no pan-European food label for animal welfare**, but some countries such as Germany, Denmark and the UK have some national product-specific labels.

Many consumers value **labelling schemes regulated by EU law**, such as **organic products, PDO labelling**

and **nutrition facts** panels. Labelling is an important cue for consumers as it helps to **communicate information about a product or production process**. In **policymaking**, the role of labels in improving **animal welfare** has attracted considerable attention.

Most local and national experiments with **animal welfare labelling** tend to be binary, indicating whether a product has been produced according to welfare-friendly standards. However, **many intermediate qualities cannot be represented by binary labels**, making these experiments a **market failure** and a no-go zone for many farmers. In this respect, **multi-level label experiments seem more promising**, as they can explicitly show different process standards for different products. Further testing is needed to assess consumer response and understanding of these schemes.

On the other hand, **many well-established labels already include animal welfare standards in their specifications on transport or slaughter conditions**. Based on the examples that already exist in the **EU market** in some Member States, such as Germany, the aim of the **animal welfare label** would be to inform the consumer about which products go **beyond the legal standards**. For pork products, for example, Germany has a label that takes into account the **conditions of the facilities** where the piglets are born, the duration of lactation, whether and how they are castrated, the **farmer's training in animal welfare**, the **transport to the slaughterhouse**, the methods and welfare in these facilities and how they go further than the legal standard requirements.

[In August 2023](#), **Germany paved the way for a mandatory state animal husbandry label** to provide transparency and clarity on how animals are reared and **enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions**. The label will distinguish between five farming methods: indoor housing, indoor and extra space, indoor with fresh air, outdoor runs and free range on pasture, and organic. The label was initially applied to pork products, with other fresh meat products to follow at a later stage. Overall, the **German animal welfare labelling system** is seen as a step towards **more transparency** for consumers and **better animal welfare** standards.

On the other hand, **Denmark** developed a '[Hearts' scoring system](#) in 2017, ranging from one to three, depending on the level of animal welfare applied to pork production, which was later expanded to chicken, beef, **and dairy products**. The requirements to get more than one heart on the label depend mainly on **the space available for the animals** or the production conditions, i.e. outdoor production and **a maximum of 8 hours of transport**. The basic requirements for beef and dairy cattle are no killing of calves, time requirement between calf and cow, **improved housing conditions** and shorter transport time.

The European Commission is still developing the **harmonised animal welfare risk indicators for the EU**, and **there is still no common definition at the EU level of what 'animal welfare' means and implies in terms of practices**. The European livestock sector is involved in all the discussions on this issue and hopes to see clear definitions being proposed that consider the many **different factors**.

Since the 1980s, **the EU has legislation to ensure acceptable animal welfare in European food production**. Many initiatives within the food supply chain also respond to **consumer demands for improved animal welfare**. Existing quality labels, for example, incorporate new elements into their specifications, while animal welfare labels experiment with consumer appetite for these products.

But the big question is still: how can we distinguish animal welfare standards from production methods when, in the EU, **animal welfare must always be respected in any farming system?**

