

LOTS OF DEMAND FOR IMPROVED ANIMAL WELFARE, BUT WHAT DO PEOPLE REALLY KNOW?



Animal welfare is very important to Europeans, with surveys regularly stating that most Europeans want to see higher standards for animal welfare than they currently have. The **European Commission** also prioritises animal welfare, as for the last 50 years, rules have been put in place and revised when needed, gradually **improving the lives of farm animals**.

The **European Union** has a **legislative framework on animal welfare**, which protects animals kept for farming purposes for producing food, wool or fur. And the European Commission is currently **revising animal welfare legislation to align it with the latest scientific evidence**. In addition, this revision aims to broaden the scope of EU legislation on animal welfare to make its enforcement easier and ultimately to ensure a higher level of animal welfare.

The EU is recognised as having **amongst the highest levels of animal welfare standards in the world**, so what is behind European citizens' negative views on animal welfare?

If you look at the details, these same surveys reporting that people are increasingly demanding higher welfare standards also very often show that people have **very little knowledge** of what is currently being done in the livestock sector.

Europeans' awareness of animal welfare practices on farms

A [recent survey](#) reported that despite a clear interest in animal welfare, **most consumers do not know enough about animal welfare practices in their country**. A test in the survey asking for True/False responses to eight statements on current farming practices and animal welfare legislation in participants' own countries showed that **7 in 10 consumers are poorly informed or not informed at all on animal welfare**. Just 3% of consumers reported that they feel 'well informed'.

The survey goes into some detail, saying that **consumers perceive farmed chickens and pigs to have the worst welfare conditions**, with 40% saying they believe the welfare conditions for chickens are 'bad' and 35% saying they believe conditions to be 'bad' for pigs. On the other hand, more consumers felt that the welfare of cows and fish was 'good' (34% and 33% respectively) than those who thought it was 'bad'.

Last year's Eurobarometer on Animal Welfare showed similar findings when it comes to knowledge of farming, with **less than one in ten Europeans in contact with farming animals**. Almost four in ten (39%) Europeans do not have regular contact with animals at all. And although [more than six out of ten Europeans](#) (62%) say they have regular contact with animals daily, the **largest proportions are in contact with pets**, and only 6% say they have regular contact with farm animals.

The Eurobarometer also showed that more than eight out of ten Europeans believe that the welfare of farmed animals in their country should be **better protected than at present**, suggesting **a growing concern about farmed animals**. Still, it is unclear what knowledge this view is based on.

This lack of regular contact with farms can clearly lead to a **loss of knowledge and little awareness of current practices** and **a distorted reality** based on headline-grabbing undercover footage of infringements or, perhaps even worse, an idyllic storybook vision of what farms should look like.

The question remains as to willingness to pay more for higher animal welfare standards

So **European consumers want better animal welfare**, but how many would go beyond the demand and put their money where their mouth is? Are people really willing or able to pay more for products that guarantee higher welfare?

Well, other surveys show that despite **calls for more 'ethical' practices and people saying they would pay more**, when it comes to shopping, **people still go for the cheapest option**. This is also confirmed by the [MeatQuality project](#), which investigates the **connection between the intrinsic quality of meat and husbandry practices**. One of the investigations is looking at consumer attitudes, which does not see alignment in purchasing decisions with the declared intention to invest in more animal welfare.

What motivation for the higher welfare demands?

Taste, food safety, cost, where the food comes from, and its **nutritional content** are the main factors influencing Europeans' food purchases, **ahead of sustainability concerns**, with only a few citing ethics and beliefs. So if animal welfare is not the main concern when people buy food, why then do surveys show people want higher animals welfare standards than what exists now in Europe?

We can only think of the imbalance in media coverage. Who is reporting on the **farmers who invest hundreds of thousands of euros** in upgrading their barns, providing enrichment, installing digital monitoring tools, or training staff? Yet how many reports do we see when things go wrong, or standards are unmet? **Animal welfare groups continue to decry an animal welfare crisis in the EU**, making sweeping statements while pointing to clear infringements of the rules in place. This clearly shows that they have no idea that **a crisis would impact the food supply**. We would be **producing much less food** than we are now if animals were generally in a state of 'welfare crisis'. An animal can only be properly productive if it is well cared for, and in the EU, **current production levels are possible thanks to high animal welfare standards**, which are among the best in the world.

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