Evaluation of the Animal Health Law

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European Commission publishes its evaluation of the EU Animal Health Law

Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the evaluation of Regulation (EU) 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health ('Animal Health Law')

Update

The European Commission has published its evaluation of the Animal Health Law (AHL, Regulation 2016/429) after 5 years of implementation.

Overall, the results of the evaluation are positive. The Commission found that all key stakeholders viewed the AHL as a strong foundation for a harmonised, preventive, and risk-based animal health policy in the EU. In particular, import conditions are now fully harmonised and are as stringent as those applied within the EU.

However, the report identifies several action points, including:

- continue to simplify EU requirements and explain them better
- review the categorisation of diseases: categorisation criteria may need to be adapted and animal diseases (re)assessed for their listing according to disease risk (categories A–E)
- improve the recognition of regionalisation by non-EU countries
- better enforce and continue to invest in disease prevention, surveillance, control, and contingency plans
- optimise the use of vaccination so that the EU contributes to developing international science-based standards and new vaccines, and reduces trade-related barriers associated with the use of vaccination
- revise and simplify the rules on transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) and zoonosis.

The Commission does not consider that any fundamental reform of the AHL is needed. It will continue to monitor progress and implement follow-up actions across all priority areas.

Impacted products

Animals and animal products

What is changing?

The Animal Health Law entered into application in 2021 with a mandatory review required after 5 years. Following public consultations and data collection from many sources, the report was published on 6 July 2026.

Overall, the European Commission's evaluation is positive. The Regulation is viewed by all key stakeholders as creating a strong foundation for a harmonised, preventive, and risk-based animal health policy in the EU. The Commission considers that "It supports a shift in focus from eradication to prevention, preparedness and proportionate long-term disease management, thereby strengthening the predictability and sustainability of EU animal health policy."

The developments that are most significant for non-EU countries are as follows.

- Import conditions are now fully harmonised at EU level. The AHL ensures that import requirements are as stringent as those applied within the EU. These entry requirements are in line with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) standards, and permit international trade in accordance with World Trade Organization sanitary and phytosanitary (WTO/SPS) principles.
- Disease listing and categorisation drive import requirements. The EU now uses a unified list of diseases (categories A–E). The eligibility of non-EU countries to export to the EU depends on the country's status for these diseases.
- Regionalisation is central. The EU recognises disease■free zones rather than imposing blanket bans on whole countries. This benefits those exporting countries that can document and defend regionalisation.
- Vaccination policies matter. Although the EU now allows broader use of vaccination (e.g. highly pathogenic avian influenza, HPAI; foot-and-mouth disease, FMD; lumpy skin disease, LSD), vaccination can still affect export eligibility unless surveillance and certification prove freedom from infection.
- Digital systems (Trade Control and Expert System, TRACES; Animal Disease Information System, ADIS) are mandatory for all imports. Non-EU countries' competent authorities must be able to issue EU■compliant digital certificates.
- EU audits of non-EU country veterinary systems have increased. Weaknesses in surveillance, reporting, or enforcement can lead to the suspension of export approval.

Despite positive overall feedback, the Commission identified certain areas that need further attention.

- Complexity of navigating all requirements: the Commission will continue to simplify when possible, or explain better through its website, guidance documents, etc.
- Categorisation of diseases: concerns remain about the timeliness of updates and adaptability to emerging risks and diseases that pose specific challenges, such as vector-borne diseases. The Commission will review if categorisation criteria should be adapted and consider launching a more comprehensive (re)assessment of the listing of animal diseases.
- Lack of recognition of regionalisation by non-EU countries: the Commission and Member States will work to improve the understanding and promotion of regionalisation through guidance and IT tools, and will advocate for recognition with trading partners in bilateral and multilateral settings.
- The full benefits of disease prevention and control have not yet been delivered: not all aspects of the AHL have been fully implemented, resulting in different experiences among Member States and groups of operators. The EU will continue to work on better enforcement of biosecurity measures, surveillance, and controls, and will adopt a Regulation on contingency plans.
- Optimising the use of vaccination: the Commission will continue to engage with WOAH, trading partners, and other international stakeholders to promote science-based approaches to vaccination.
- Confusion about TSE rules: as the rules on this disease are separate from the AHL, it is necessary to address any confusion. The Commission has already published proposals in the Food and Feed Safety simplification omnibus (see Simplification of EU food and feed safety rules), and will launch a comprehensive revision of the TSE rules. It will also review, simplify, and update the existing zoonosis Directive.

The Commission's evaluation concludes that no fundamental reform is needed, but continued consolidation, clarification, and consistent implementation of the AHL will be needed to deliver its full potential.

Timeline

The European Commission will continue to monitor progress and implement follow-up actions across all priority areas.

What are the major implications for exporting countries?

Animal diseases are a threat to animals and humans – they evolve, and do not respect borders. It is a high global priority to monitor and contain any spread of diseases. The goal is to shift from eradication to prevention, preparedness, and proportionate long-term disease management.

Non-EU countries exporting animals and animal products to the EU must continue to reinforce their national veterinary authority's capacity (such as national legislation aligned with EU requirements, clear operator responsibilities, strong enforcement mechanisms, adequate staffing and training, robust surveillance, reliable laboratory capacity, and modern traceability systems). These aspects are evaluated through EU audits carried out in non-EU countries.

Recommended Actions

In cases of disease outbreaks, regionalisation can potentially reduce damage to exports if the exporting country can demonstrate a rapid detection system, transparent reporting, and effective containment in the zone of the disease.

Background

This evaluation Report assesses the achievements of the AHL, which entered into force in 2016 and has applied since 2021. It is informed by a Study supporting the evaluation of the EU animal health law (up to 31 December 2023), and accompanied by a Commission Staff Working Document (up to early 2026). Both documents draw on monitoring data and stakeholder inputs from multiple consultations including the Chief Veterinary Officers (CVO) forum, Animal Health Advisory Committees, and other expert groups.

The evaluation also relies on implementation reports and notifications from EU Member States, European Commission Audit Reports, data from the Animal Disease Information System (ADIS), scientific opinions from the European Food Safety Authority(EFSA), and findings from the EU Veterinary Emergency Team (EUVET).

The evaluation period coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical disruptions, increased costs (particularly energy), and significant disease outbreaks including HPAI and African swine fever. These factors make it difficult to attribute impacts or to draw definitive conclusions. The evaluation still provides early, indicative insights although a more robust assessment will require additional time and data.

The European Commission evaluated Regulation 2016/429 in accordance with the EU Better Regulation principles.

See: EU Animal Health Law explained; Animal health requirements for non-EU countries exporting to the EU – explained

Resources

Online resources from the European Commission:

- Commission Staff Working Document: Accompanying the document Report from the Commission on the evaluation of Regulation (EU) 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health ('Animal Health Law')
- Study supporting the evaluation of the EU animal health law – Final report
- Evaluation of the Animal Health Law
- High-level Conference on Animal Health Law – 10 years of achievement, 8 July 2026 [presentations and video recording]

Regulation (EU) 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health ('Animal Health Law')

Sources

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