

On-farm animal welfare: Review of EU laws

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EU to review on-farm animal welfare rules, including for imports – call for evidence for impact assessment

On-farm animal welfare for certain animals: modernisation of EU legislation

Update

The European Commission is reviewing its on-farm animal welfare rules, in particular relating to the use of cages (for breeding laying hens, pigs, calves, pullets, broiler breeders, layer breeders, rabbits, ducks, geese, and quails), and the killing of male day-old chicks in the laying hens sector.

The on-farm animal welfare rules of the European Union (EU) currently do not apply to imports of animals and animal products. **The EU will review to what extent these rules should apply to imports, notably for poultry, pigs, calves, and rabbits, and their products.**

The consultation via the European Commission's [Have Your Say](#) webpage closed on 16 July 2025.

Impacted products

Laying hens, pigs, calves, pullets, broiler breeders, layer breeders, rabbits, ducks, geese, quails, and their products

What is changing?

The [European Commission's \(2022\)](#) fitness check on EU animal welfare legislation concluded that it is no longer fit for purpose. The legislation is no longer aligned with societal and ethical expectations, as clearly shown by the [End the Cage Age](#) European Citizens' Initiative.

The Commission therefore intends to review and harmonise further the animal welfare rules across the EU. It is taking into account the latest scientific evidence, with particular attention to the following.

- Phasing out cages: an impact assessment and the results of this call for evidence will help the Commission decide which sectors should be included in a ban on cages. This will

potentially affect laying hens, pigs, calves, pullets, broiler breeders, layer breeders, rabbits, ducks, geese, and quails.

- Improving monitoring: the monitoring of animal welfare is currently considered to be inadequate. The Commission intends to identify relevant animal welfare indicators, and methods for measuring them.
- Assessing import requirements: the Commission will assess whether animal welfare requirements – both existing (see Background) and new requirements – should be imposed on imports of animals and animal products. This will potentially affect poultry, pigs, calves, and rabbits, and their products.
- Killing of male day-old chicks (laying hens sector): the Commission intends to phase out this practice.

Why?

Animal welfare is one of the priority areas for action identified by the [EU Vision for Agriculture and Food 2025–2029](#). In particular, the Commission emphasises the importance of maintaining fair competition between imported products and those produced in the EU. The drive for a review of animal welfare rules is primarily a response to public concerns about the use of cages for certain animals and the killing of male day-old chicks.

Timeline

The European Commission aims to carry out consultations in 2025 and present a proposal for new rules in 2026.

What are the major implications for exporting countries?

EU rules concerning on-farm animal welfare do not currently apply to imported animals or animal products. A revision of current rules following this review could impose new requirements on exporters of these products to the EU.

Recommended Actions

The consultation via the European Commission's [Have Your Say](#) webpage closed on 16 July 2025.

The consultation offered an opportunity to provide initial feedback on the Commission's overall intention to explore equivalent animal welfare production standards on imported products, in line with international rules. It was an opportunity for low- and middle-income countries currently exporting animal products (specifically pork, poultry, calves, and rabbits) to identify areas of animal welfare rules (set out in Council Directive [98/58/EC](#), see Background) that they consider would particularly contribute to improving animal health, or could potentially be challenging for exporters supplying the EU market.

Background

Council Directive [98/58/EC](#) sets out minimum standards for the protection of all farmed animals. This includes the conditions under which animals must be bred or kept, taking into account their needs on the basis of experience and scientific knowledge. It covers animals' freedom of movement, buildings accommodation, feed and water, and breeding procedures. It also includes issues related to the management of farms such as staffing, inspection, and record keeping.

More detailed rules are set out in specific legislation for:

- Broiler chickens: Council Directive 2007/43/EC
- Calves: Council Directive 2008/119/EC
- Laying hens: Council Directive 1999/74/EC
- Pigs: Council Directive 2008/120/EC

For an overview, see the European Commission webpage [Animal welfare on the farm](#).

Resources

Council Directives:

[98/58/EC](#) concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes

[2007/43/EC](#) laying down minimum rules for the protection of chickens kept for meat production

[2008/119/EC](#) laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves

[1999/74/EC](#) laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens

[2008/120/EC](#) laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs

European Commission (2022) Staff Working Document: [Fitness Check of the EU Animal Welfare legislation](#)

European Commission webpage [Animal welfare on the farm](#)

Sources

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