

Farm Animal Welfare

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Introduction

This pamphlet will analyse the various laws on animal welfare across several European countries. The research will focus on farm animals (cattle, pigs, chickens), and abattoirs. The countries included in this research are Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Germany, France, Spain and the UK.

Most people eat meat as well as fruit and vegetables so how the animals are kept and slaughtered is very important.

Due to advancements in science, the status of animals has evolved from being seen as 'things' to sentient living beings. Animal welfare is a result of several combining factors (physiological, environmental, health, social and psychological). Animal welfare is ensured by five freedoms:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst.
2. Freedom from discomfort (appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area).
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease.
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour (sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind).
5. Freedom from fear and distress (conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering).

Cattle

1. Wales

EU law on the welfare of cattle is transposed into UK law. UK legislation requires that calves must be provided with bedding at all times, whereas the EU only requires bedding for the first 2 weeks of a calves life. The Welsh Code of Practice requires cattle to have a wholesome diet and daily access to fresh drinking water. It is worth noting that bullfighting is illegal in the UK.

2. EU

There is no EU legislation dedicated for dairy cattle, however, Council Directive 2009/119/EC lays the minimum standards of protection for calves. After the age of eight weeks, the use of confined individual pens is prohibited. Individual pens must have perforated walls, allowing calves to have direct visual and tactile contact. Calves must not be kept permanently in darkness, with a combination of natural and artificial light. Owners must inspect indoor calves at least twice daily, and calves outside once daily. The accommodation of calves must permit them to lie down, rest, stand up, groom themselves. Calves must not be tethered, however, group-housed calves are the exception, which may be tethered for no more than one hour at the time of feeding milk.

3. Denmark

In Denmark, calves over the age of eight weeks may not be kept in individual boxes, unless required to do so by a veterinarian. If calves are housed individually they must have access to direct visual and tactile contact. For cattle kept on grass, electric fencing around fields and pathways may be used. Annually a hoof inspection must take place by a professional who does not work on the farm. The tethering of cattle was first stated to be phased out by 2022, however, this has been postponed to 2027.

Danish regulation with regards to keeping calves exceeds the EU's requirements. Danish calves benefit from enhanced space allowances and stricter requirements for fibrous food. Danish legislation takes the calves needs into account, whereas EU regulations do not. In Denmark, the suckling needs must be met in connection with the milk ingestion. This must be done either through the use of soother buckets, soothers, or an artificial teat. It is worth noting that bullfighting is banned in Denmark.

4. Spain

In Spain, Council Directive 2009/119/EC is implemented in Royal Decree 1047/1994. Therefore, Spanish law does not exceed the EU requirements. It is worth noting that bullfighting is legal in Spain. However, it is outlawed in some Spanish cities, such as Calonge, Tossa de Mar, Vilamacolum and La Vajol.

5. Sweden

In Sweden, roughly 55% of cattle are tethered indoors for most of the year. However, in the summer cattle have the right to be outside for 2-4 months, and at least 6 hours a day. Lying areas for dairy cows shall have acceptable bedding of straw or similar material that fulfils the same function. Keeping calves isolated is also banned. The dehorning of cattle shall be performed by a veterinarian or someone of equivalent

Pigs

1. Wales

In The UK, sow stalls are prohibited, and the law requires pigs to be able to turn around without difficulty. Sows may be kept in farrowing crates from seven days before farrowing until weaning. Under the Red Tractor assurance scheme, castration is not permitted. Subsequently, only 2% of male pigs are castrated in the UK.

2. EU

At the EU level, the welfare provisions for pigs are laid out in Council Directive 2008/120/EC. Under Article 3, the tethering of sows is prohibited. Sows must be kept in groups rather than in individual stalls. Pigs must be given a sufficient quantity of bulky or high fibre food and high energy food to satisfy their hunger and need to chew. They must have access to manipulatable materials (i.e. straw, hay, sawdust) to satisfy their natural behaviour. Pregnant sows must have at least 1.3 square metres of a solid floor. Generally, procedures on pigs other than therapeutic or diagnostic purposes are banned, however, EU law permits:

- Teeth grinding or clipping before 7 days old
- Tail-docking
- Castration of male pigs by other means than tearing of the tissue
- Nose-ripping only when animals are kept in outdoor husbandry systems.

3. Denmark

In Denmark, a person trained in tail-docking is allowed to tail-dock a piglet without the use of anaesthetic within the first 2-4 days of life. Furthermore, a person trained in castration is allowed to castrate a piglet without the use of anaesthetic within the first 2-7 days of life. Teeth grinding/ clipping must not be carried out routinely, except for injury to sows' teats or other pigs' ears. No piglet shall be weaned from the sow at less than 28 days.

However, Denmark falls under the EU 2013 commitment to ban sow stalls. Farrowing crates are also not outlawed but are innovating with the free farrowing system, which affords more space than the conventional farrowing crate.

4. Germany

In Germany, the Regulations of Farm Animals (TierSchNutztV) sets the minimum standard for the protection of pigs. Rearing pigs are required to have 50% continuous solid floor. Dry pregnant sows and gilts should be fed at least 8% dry matter or 200g high fibre. The Act demands that pigs are provided with at least 80 lux for more than eight hours per day, including access to daylight.

Chickens

1. Wales

a) Broiler Chickens

In the UK, the stocking density is the same as the EU maximum, however, if certain welfare and husbandry conditions are met, the stocking density may be raised to 39 kg/m².

b) Egg-laying Hens

In the UK, EU legislation on egg-laying chickens is transposed into UK law.

2. EU

a) Broiler Chickens

At the EU level, welfare provisions for broiler chickens are laid out in Council Directive 2007/43/EC. Under the Directive, training courses focusing on welfare aspects are required for people dealing with chickens. Inspections of chickens shall be carried out twice a day. Beak trimming is permitted only when other measures to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism are exhausted. Beak trimming shall only be carried out within 10 days of the chickens birth and by a trained professional. The castration of chickens shall only be carried out by veterinary supervision and by a trained professional.

b) Egg-laying Hens

At the EU level, welfare provisions for egg-laying hens are laid out in Council Directive 1999/74/EC. Non-enriched cage systems are prohibited. Two cage systems are now in use:

- Enriched cages with at least 750 cm² of the cage area per hen.
- Alternative systems where the stocking density does not exceed nine egg-laying hens per m², at least one nest per seven hens and adequate perches.

All hens must have a nest, perching space, litter to allow pecking and scratching and unrestricted access to a feed trough. Hens must be inspected once a day. The sound level must be minimised and light levels shall allow hens to show 'normal levels of activity' (Article 2). Mutilations are banned except for beak trimming, provided it is carried out within the first 10 days of a hens' life.

3. Denmark

a) Broiler Chickens

In Denmark, the maximum stocking density is in line with EU regulations of 42 kg per m². Roughly 5% of broiler production sites are chosen at random for inspection each year. If welfare problems are highlighted in a flock, they may be ordered to lower the stocking density to as low as 25kg per m². However, Danish law does not exceed the EU's minimal legislation on stocking density.

b) Egg-laying Hens

In Denmark, noise levels must be kept to a minimum to ensure the welfare of hens. Beak trimming is authorised for chickens who are less than 10 days old. There must be an inspection of chickens at least once per day. The Danish law allows for enriched cages for egg-laying hens. There is a maximum of 10 hens per cage, and a requirement for access to a nest and bedding in sufficient quantities, to meet their need to peck, scrape and dust bathe. The size of the cages depends on whether the breed is light, medium or heavy.

4. Germany

a) Broiler Chickens

In Germany, the regulation permits a maximum stocking density of 39 kg/m², compared with the EU permitted stocking density of 42 kg/m². However, the Act falls short of further reductions to a stocking density of 30 kg/m².

b) Egg-laying Hens

In Germany, small group housing systems will be phased out by 2025. However, the Act falls short of banning all types of cages.

5. Spain

a) Broiler Chickens

In Spain, the Council Directive 2007/ 43/ EC is implemented in Law 692/2010. Therefore, Spanish law does not exceed the minimum EU law.

b) Egg-laying Hens

In Spain, Council Directive 1999/74/EC is implemented in Royal Decree 3/2002. Therefore, Spanish law does not exceed the minimum EU law.

Abattoirs

1. Wales

In Wales and the UK, all matters related to killing, including transport must limit the unnecessary suffering of animals. Slaughterers must be fully trained and licensed. A veterinarian must be present at abattoirs during operations. Stunning is required before slaughtering in UK abattoirs. Animals must be killed as quickly and painlessly as possible. Religious slaughter is allowed in the UK. CCTV is compulsory in all English abattoirs, however, it is not required yet in Wales. Out of the 26 abattoirs in Wales, 8 use CCTV.

2. Denmark

Denmark's Animal Protections Act states that animals must be slaughtered as quickly and as painlessly as possible. The Act itself does not ban slaughter without sedation, however, in 2014 an ordinance was issued effectively banning kosher and non-sedated halal meat. Religious slaughter is allowed, however, the animal must be sedated before killing. Only poultry, sheep and goats may be slaughtered religiously. These animals must be sedated by a non-penetrative bolt, and if this fails it must be immediately sedated by a penetrative bolt or electricity. Additionally, the animal must be at least eight months old.

3. Finland

Finland is a member of the European Union and thus bound by EC Regulation 1109/2012 on the protection of animals during slaughter. The Finnish Animal Protections Act states that animals must be sedated before slaughter. However, religious slaughter is an exception, where sedation must happen simultaneously with the start of bloodletting. Finnish law requires religiously slaughtered animals to only be slaughtered in abattoirs where a veterinarian is present. Violations of the slaughter rules result in a fine or imprisonment of up to two years. Poultry and meat may be sedated with electricity, whereas cattle must be slaughtered by a penetrative bolt pistol.

4. Germany

Generally, slaughter without sedation is banned in Germany, however, a no-stunning permit may be granted for religious slaughtering. However, the permit will not be granted if there are other ways of slaughter within that religion. The needs of religious freedom and animal protection are balanced on a case-by-case basis.

5. Norway

Animal welfare rules in Norway state that the killing of animals must have regard for the welfare of the animal. Appropriate methods of killing depend on current scientific knowledge i.e. animal breed, development level, killing methods. The

person responsible for the handling of the killing must be competent ensuring the treatment of the animal is optimal. Furthermore, the handling in connection with the killing must be done concerning the animal's welfare. The Norwegian Animal Welfare Act requires sedation before the killing, including religious slaughtering. Poultry and sheep may be sedated using electricity, a nonpenetrating bolt, or penetrating bolt. Cattle must be killed using only a penetrating bolt pistol.

6. Spain

Spain permits religious slaughter without sedation in approved slaughterhouses. Before slaughter, the slaughterhouse or religious community must notify the authority that slaughter will take place. An official veterinarian must supervise all religious slaughter. Violations of the law risk the closure of the slaughterhouse, and a fee between €601 and €6,000.

Conclusion

I am very proud of the laws in Wales relating to farm animal welfare and leaving the European Union must not lead to poorer standards of animal welfare either in Wales or of animals imported into Wales

I am pleased that generally, the laws relating to farm animal welfare in Wales are at least as good as that in the rest of Europe.

We need to always ensure that the five freedoms for animals are always met

Freedom from hunger and thirst.

Freedom from discomfort (appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area).

Freedom from pain, injury or disease.

Freedom to express normal behaviour (sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind).

Freedom from fear and distress (conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering).

One glaring anomaly is no CCTV in abattoirs, and I am calling for that to be made mandatory in Wales.