

Creating incentives for improved animal welfare

Executive summary

Eurogroup for Animal Welfare welcomes the fact that animal welfare has been given a central position within the EU rural development regulation by the 2003 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. Support to farmers for improved animal welfare is now possible through several new measures and Eurogroup urges Member States to include these possibilities in their current and future national rural development programmes.

Rural Development Regulation

The Göteborg Council of June 2001 made it clear that improving animal welfare is a legitimate objective of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The Council concluded: 'During recent years, European agricultural policy has... become more oriented towards satisfying the general public's growing demands regarding food safety, food quality, product differentiation, animal welfare, environmental quality and the conservation of nature and the countryside'.

This is reflected in the reforms of the CAP agreed in 2003, which provide a new opportunity to focus on sustainable agriculture and produce high quality food that delivers animal welfare and other rural development goals.

Animal welfare has been given a central position within the Rural Development Regulation (RDR). The RDR now includes a range of measures under which financial support can be given to producers who wish to achieve improved animal welfare.

The following six RDR measures are of particular importance for animal welfare.

- 'Agri-environment and Animal Welfare'; this enables support to be given to farmers who enter into an 'animal welfare commitment' that involves more than the application of usual good animal husbandry practice. Support is designed to help with the additional running costs, to compensate for income foregone and to provide an incentive.
- 'Food quality' which enables support to be given to farmers who participate in food quality schemes that go significantly beyond commercial commodity standards as regards, among other things, animal welfare. Help can be given with the cost of joining the scheme, annual membership contributions and the cost of checks to verify compliance with the scheme.



- 'Meeting standards' which enables aid to be given to help farmers who have to meet demanding animal welfare standards based on new Community legislation.
- 'Investment in agricultural holdings' which allows help to be provided with the capital costs involved in introducing improved animal welfare systems.
- 'Farm advisory services' which enables support to be provided for the cost of using such services to identify the improvements that farmers need to make in order to comply with statutory welfare standards.
- 'Training' which enables support to be given for education in production practices compatible with the protection of animal welfare.



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Animal welfare standards under rural development regulation

Three different levels of animal welfare standards should be set in a pyramid approach to improving welfare under the RDR (see figure).

- The base level requires compliance with legislation which is enforced through the cross-compliance mechanism and can be helped under the 'meeting standards' measure.
- The intermediate level would deliver specific improvements under the 'agri-environment and animal welfare' and 'investment' measures. Intermediate level schemes could, for example, include the provision of training for stockpersons, the establishment of veterinary health plans for farms and the conversion of slatted floors for pigs or cattle to straw-based solid floors.

- The highest level would adopt a 'whole farm' approach requiring high standards in all aspects of the farm's husbandry. Support at this level could be given under the 'food quality' and 'agri-environment and animal welfare' measures and could be based on the standards produced for a number of sectors by Eurogroup for Animal Welfare.

The Eurogroup standards could form the standards that go 'significantly beyond the commercial commodity standards' that are required by the food quality measure as well as those that involve more than the application of 'usual good animal husbandry practice' that are required by the 'agri-environment and animal welfare' measure.

Costed examples

Through several case studies, the report provides a number of costed examples of the kind of high welfare systems and practices that could be supported by the RDR measures.

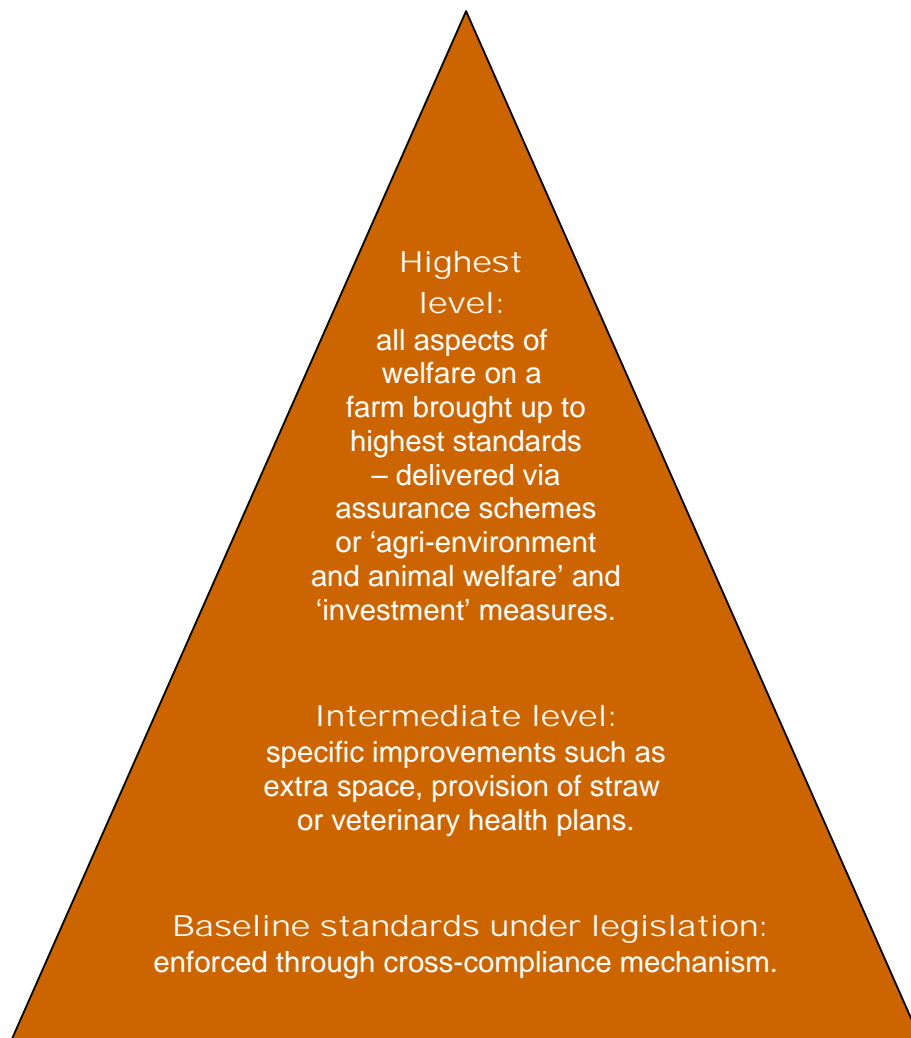
These examples include:

- replacing slatted floors for pigs with straw-based solid floors
- free-range broiler chickens
- high-welfare pig rearing
- meeting standards in egg production
- training for improved stockmanship
- implementation of veterinary health plans.



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Delivering animal welfare benefits
through different levels of standards



Conclusion

Eurogroup urges Member States to provide support under their rural development plans (RDP) to farmers who wish to adopt improved animal welfare standards. Such assistance should in particular be given under the RDR measures that permit support for farmers who participate in food quality schemes; give animal welfare commitments; are required to meet new legislative standards; make investments in agricultural holdings; or use farm advisory services.

Animal welfare improvements have been achieved in UK (Wales) under the 'less-favoured areas' (LFA) measure even though the RDR does not specifically include animal welfare in the remit of LFAs. Where Member States include in their RDP measures that do not expressly incorporate animal welfare objectives, they should nonetheless try to ensure, where appropriate, that animal welfare benefits are derived from the application of those measures.

The RDR's animal welfare objectives and the RDR itself are seriously under-funded. A substantially larger part of the CAP budget should be devoted to Pillar 2 (rural development) and Member States should commit much more of the expenditure under their RDPs to the objective of improving animal welfare.

In the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations the EU is pressing for payments to assist farmers to achieve high welfare standards to be included in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture's 'Green Box'. This aim must be mirrored by a willingness by the EU and the Member States to commit RDR money to improving animal welfare.

Animal welfare is central to the future of the whole farming and food production sector, with its close links to measures designed to improve animal health and the environment, as well as responding to consumer and producer wishes and needs. It is imperative that the opportunities for improving animal welfare given under Regulation 1783/2003 are taken up by Member States in their RDPs and it is hoped that this report provides a framework under which this can be achieved.



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