

BRIEFNOTE:

Why the time
is right for Europe
and China to act
for animals

JULY 2021



CONTEXT

Over the past years, China's political leadership has shown more openness to discussing animal welfare issues. The creation in 2013 of the [International Cooperation Committee of Animal Welfare](#) (ICCAW), a government-backed non-profit organisation dedicated to 'promoting animal welfare concepts, implementing animal welfare-friendly farming systems and improving the quality and safety of livestock products', was a first important step.

As demonstrated by discussions ongoing in the latest Chinese Peoples' Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), there is also growing interest in the elaboration of an animal protection law.¹ On the EU side, the von der Leyen Commission has put sustainability at the heart of its agenda and the publication of the [Farm to Fork strategy](#) paved the way for the long awaited review of EU animal welfare standards. After the COVID-19 crisis, the EU is also putting a strong emphasis on building resilience and levelling the playing field. Working with China on animal welfare could contribute to both of these objectives.

¹ <https://twitter.com/paulrspca/status/1264483940775141376?s=20>

“ COVID-19 demonstrated the human and economic costs of a zoonose pandemic and, while it emerged from wildlife, it has also reminded the world of the role played by intensive farming in spreading zoonoses. How we produce and consume food has an impact not only on animals but also on public health, the environment, people and climate. Working together on improving animal welfare can play a key role in finding solutions to many of the current global challenges we are facing: climate change, antimicrobial resistance, as well as the spread of pandemics. With all the developments in the EU, such as the Farm to Fork Strategy, which should see the improvement of our animal welfare standards, there has never been a better time for us to discuss this topic with China.



Stated **Janusz Wojciechowski**, EU Commissioner for Agriculture, in his opening speech during the Eurogroup for Animals [China report](#) launch event.

Chinese imports into the EU



SUSTAINABILITY IN EU-CHINA RELATIONS

Relations between the European Union and China have reached an unprecedented level since they were first established in 1975, and sustainability has become a key topic on their agenda. **The European Union has become China's largest trading partner while China is the European Union's second-largest partner.** In 2019, EU-China bilateral trade amounted to EUR 560 billion, with imports of Chinese animal products into the European Union accounting for roughly 0.6% (EUR 2.3 billion) and export of EU animal products to China accounting for 3.7% (EUR 7.3 billion).²

In December 2020, the EU and China concluded an investment agreement, displaying a series of broad commitments on sustainability. While the agreement calls on the Parties to promote Responsible Business Conduct (RBC)/ Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), it does not ensure that EU and Chinese investments will not fuel unsustainable livestock farming practices. It is thus even more necessary to develop a parallel structure of cooperation between the partners, notably on animal welfare, to ensure that animal welfare is seen as a part of RBC/CSR and that investments generated by the agreement do not fuel an unsustainable food system.

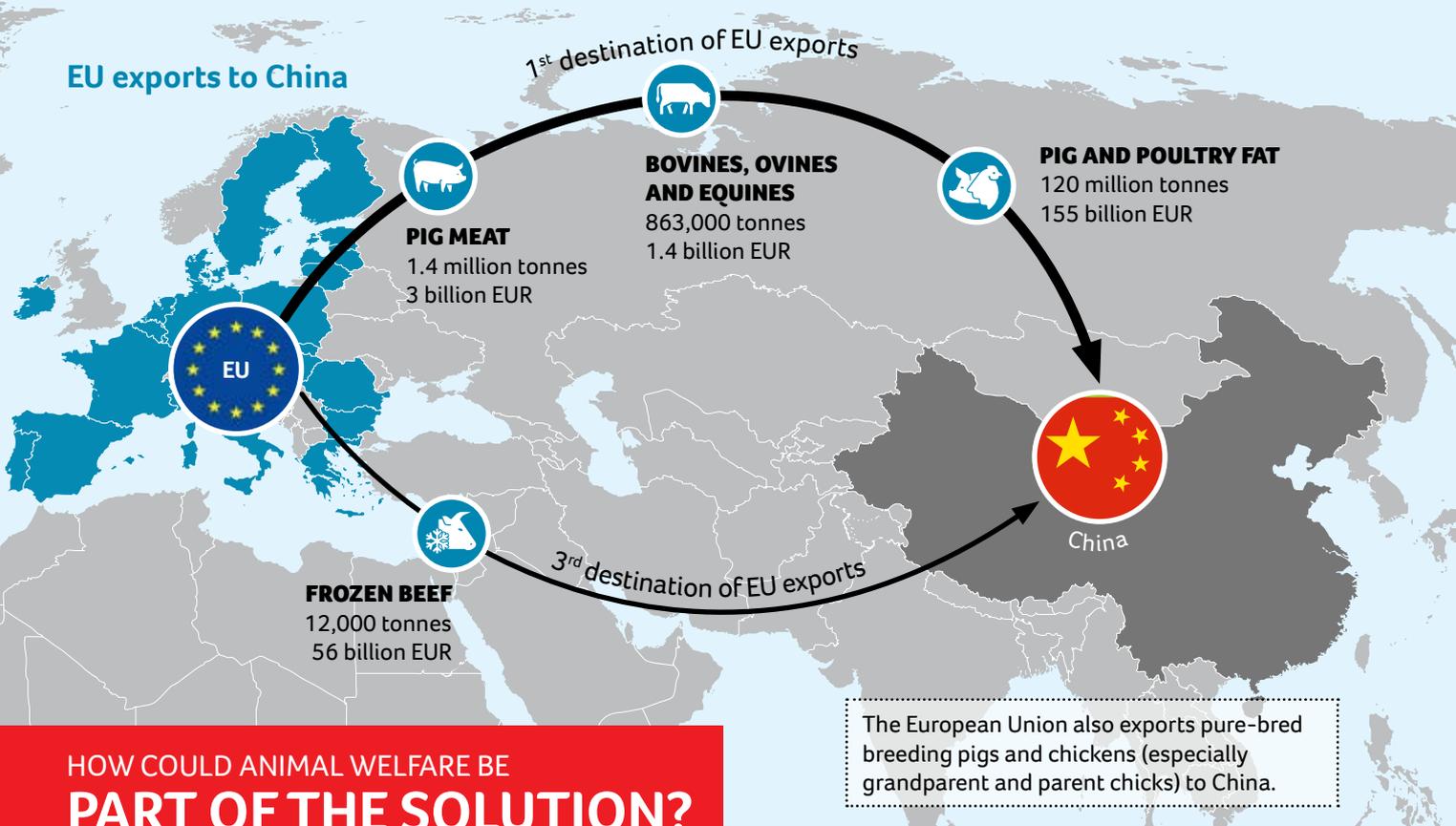
² https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_china_en.pdf (statistics including HS categories 1-5, i.e. live animals, meat, dairies, eggs and other raw products)

“ In the future, [China] will proactively promote animal welfare to meet the needs of sustainable socio-economic development. Firstly, [it] will carry out in-depth science-based animal welfare research with Chinese characteristics, to promote the safe, high-yielding, resource-saving and environment-friendly development of animal production in China. Secondly, [China] will participate proactively in the development of international standards on animal welfare, to coordinate and cooperate for a just and fair international trade in animal and animal products.



Dr. Xiao Xiao, OIE animal welfare China liaison, Associate Researcher of China Animal Health and Epidemiology Center of Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs

EU exports to China



HOW COULD ANIMAL WELFARE BE PART OF THE SOLUTION?

An increased focus on animal welfare can play a key role in finding solutions to many of the current global challenges we are facing – including climate change and antimicrobial resistance, as well as pandemics.

Considering the pressing nature of these crises and recent political developments for both partners, there has never been a better time to call on the European Union and China to cooperate on this topic.

ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS

Improving animal welfare standards can contribute to achieving several objectives and specifically Sustainable Development Goals:



By positively impacting animal health, it can help build more resilience in the food production sector.



It also benefits human health by helping to reduce the risk of food-borne diseases and zoonoses, as well as to lessen the use of antibiotics in animal productions.



Improving the conditions in which we raise animals can also, if their numbers do not increase, contribute to fighting the climate crisis.



Finally, higher animal welfare standards can also generate concrete economic benefits for the producers.



THE NEED TO TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION SYSTEMS

Moving towards more sustainable production and consumption systems includes lowering the production and consumption of meat and dairy products and by doing so could generate multiple positive effects:



This could have huge benefits for public health, lowering cases of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.



Reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions as the dairy and meat sector represents around 14.5% of GHG.



Reducing water pollution as the dairy and meat sector is a massive source of it.



Improving sustainability of meat and dairy production and consumption would also help fighting biodiversity loss.



“ Intensive production systems rely on the use, overuse and even misuse of animal drugs as growth promoters. This implies specific vulnerabilities. The more hurricanes, the more extreme weather events we will have due to climate change, the more vulnerable these intensive production systems are. With every flood or heavy rains, the antibiotics and hormones end up spread in natural waters and rivers, creating extra pressure on natural resources.”



Dr. Cristina Tirado, Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Public Health, Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, UCLA



SHARING INNOVATIVE APPROACH AND BEST PRACTICES

Many innovative practices are being developed in China and in the EU, not only around circular and regenerative agriculture, but also relying on new technologies, from cellphones to cultivated and plant-based meat. These could serve as a basis to a fruitful cooperation between both partners.

“ We will accelerate the process of animal welfare legislation, when appropriate adding to and amending the relevant provisions of existing laws and regulations, while at the same time facilitating the development of comprehensive new legislation and regulation for the promotion of animal welfare.



Yu Kangzhen,
Vice Minister for Agriculture,
2017

“ China is an important partner for the EU and we welcome the report presented by Eurogroup for Animals. It represents an important set of possible ways to engage, not only for DG SANTE but for the whole range of other DGs involved. This document could help to focus and coordinate better in the future.



Andrea Gavinelli,
Head of Unit: Animal welfare,
antimicrobial resistance,
European Commission

RECOMMENDATIONS

Eurogroup for Animals would provide the following recommendations as a way forward:

- ➔ The European Union could improve its **animal welfare standards**, relying on the most recent animal welfare science. It could also develop standards for species which are currently left unprotected. China could also build up on the work led by authoritative organisations such as ICCAW and CAS to establish mandatory animal welfare standards.
- ➔ The EU and China could explicitly refer to animal welfare in the coming EU-China 2025 **Cooperation Agenda**, notably in the section related to cooperation around public health.
- ➔ Animal Welfare could be explicitly mentioned in the **EU-China agricultural dialogue**, as a dimension of sustainable farming. Programmes put in place under such dialogue, like exchange of young farmers, could also pay specific attention to the topic.
- ➔ The EU and China could establish a **joint expert working group** on future food policies including sustainable and higher welfare livestock production as well as animal welfare and humane and sustainable protein innovation. For example, the EU and China could develop **cooperation among researchers**, notably on pig, fish and broiler welfare, to develop guidelines that would allow producers to provide enhance animal welfare, taking into account the specificities of each context
- ➔ In the future **EU-China investment agreement**, the Parties could require EU businesses to respect EU-equivalent standards when investing in animal agriculture in China. Provisions on investment and sustainable development could also include the OIE Aquatic and Terrestrial Codes in the list of international commitments the Parties commit to respect
- ➔ The EU and China could aim at establishing a Memorandum of Understanding between DG SANTE and its counterparts in China - the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the National Health and Family Planning Commission - to develop a more structured cooperation on animal welfare, possibly in the context of the fight against antimicrobial resistance.

EUROGROUP FOR ANIMALS - A TRUSTED PARTNER IN TRADE POLICY

Launched in 1980, Eurogroup for Animals is the leading pan-European animal advocacy organisation. We unite and amplify the voices of 70 national and international animal protection organisations across Europe, Switzerland, Serbia, Norway, Australia and the USA. Together we provide a voice for the billions of animals kept in laboratories, farms and households, and for those living in the wild.

We believe in an inclusive approach, engaging with all stakeholders - from farmers and industries to political decision-makers, to define a common path towards improving the life of animals. We are part of more than 40 EU expert consultative bodies, covering areas such as farm animals, wildlife, animals used for scientific purposes, but also EU Trade Agreements. In the European Parliament, we run the Secretariat of the Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals, with 93 MEPs from all Political groups and 24 member States.

Read the full report [here](#).



EUROGROUP FOR ANIMALS

© Eurogroup for Animals, June 2021

Eurogroup for Animals

Rue Ducale 29 – 1000 Brussels

Tel: +32 (0)2 740 08 20

info@eurogroupforanimals.org

eurogroupforanimals.org