

# Consumer' concerns about animal welfare vary widely in Europe



Considerable attention is being given to what consumers can do to improve farm animal welfare. Linking improvements of farm animal welfare to what people do as food consumers is essential to realise better animal welfare in Europe. Welfare Quality<sup>®</sup> has been investigating the consumers views and concerns about animal welfare in seven European countries. This study shows that such linkages vary considerably across Europe.

Across Europe, a large majority of consumers say that farm animal welfare is important. This ranged from 69% of respondents in the Netherlands, 73% in the UK, 75% in France to 83% in Hungary and Sweden. Norway and Italy scored the highest, with 84% and 87% respectively. There is still concern among consumers, first of all related to conditions in poultry production, but also to conditions of pigs. Compared to these, people tend to see the treatment of dairy cows as least worrisome. People are concerned about conditions on the farm; transportation and slaughtering are also met with concern.

Public opinions differ considerably across the seven countries. Italian and French respondents are quite worried about welfare conditions in their own country; concerns are often associated with food purchasing, and trust in actors in the food sector is relatively low. Hungarians do worry about the issue and they are also more pessimistic about current trends, but animal welfare is of less relevance when shopping. The Dutch display lower general interest, but many worry. Many do think of welfare conditions when shopping for eggs and

beef. Trust in actors is high. The British show similar patterns, but trust in authorities, market actors and organisations is much lower.

Finally, the Swedes and the Norwegians are engaged with the issue; they are trusting and not worried. Particularly in Norway, animal welfare is rarely associated with the consumer role.

When asked about changes over the last ten years, there is considerable optimism in most countries. A majority of consumers thinks that conditions for farm animals have improved, while less than one in five think that the situation has become worse. This optimism may be one of many reasons why the researchers found that the proportions of people who associate animal welfare concerns and worries with their own purchasing practices are much lower than the general interest and concern. They may simply not see the need for action.

Still quite a few consumers do think about such issues when shopping for eggs, beef or milk. These proportions are generally much higher than the market shares for special animal-friendly products. This indicates a

This research was executed within the first Subproject of Welfare Quality®.

It investigates societal attitudes and practices among consumers, farmers and retailers, as they impact upon animal welfare. It assesses to what extent new welfare strategies might be achievable in practice. Subproject leader is Unni Kjærnes, Unni.Kjarnes@sifo.no

wider consumer definition of food animal welfare than product labels offer. In understanding this, we must also consider the products that are on offer in the food markets across Europe and how they are labelled. Later studies in Welfare Quality® will investigate such topics.

The results of the survey are published in full in Attitudes of Consumers, Retailers and Producers to Animal Welfare, Welfare Quality Reports No. 2, Cardiff University, UK. The study was conducted among 10,500 consumers. The findings are based on representative samples in France, Hungary, Italy, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. The study was conducted by Unni Kjærnes of the National Institute for Consumer Research, Oslo and seven other European research institutes/ universities: Ashtown Food Research Centre - Ireland, Cardiff University - United Kingdom, Stockholm University - Sweden, University of Pisa - Italy, University of Reading - United Kingdom, Université de Toulouse le Mirail - France, Wageningen University and Research Centre, The Netherlands.

**More information:**

Unni Kjaerness, unni.kjarnes@sifo.no

*This fact sheet is available in several languages on the Welfare Quality® website [www.welfarequality.net](http://www.welfarequality.net). Other topics like "Principles and criteria of good animal welfare" "Marketing farm animal welfare" or "Preventing Lameness in Broiler Chickens" are also listed there in easily downloadable documents.*



**Project Coordinator**

Prof. Dr Harry J. Blokhuis, The Netherlands  
harry.blokhuis@hnh.sl.u.se

**Project Office Welfare Quality®**

Animal Sciences Group of Wageningen UR  
Postbox 65, 8200 AB Lelystad  
The Netherlands  
Phone: +31 320 293503  
Fax: +31 320 238050  
e-mail [info@welfarequality.net](mailto:info@welfarequality.net)

[www.welfarequality.net](http://www.welfarequality.net)

Welfare Quality® is a European research project focussing on the integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain. The project aims to accommodate societal concerns and market demands, to develop reliable on-farm monitoring systems, product information systems, and practical species-specific strategies to improve animal welfare. Forty-four institutes and universities, representing thirteen European countries and four Latin American countries participate in this integrated research project.

Welfare Quality® is co-financed by the European Commission, within the 6th Framework Programme, contract No. FOOD-CT-2004-506508.

The text represents the authors' views and does not necessarily represent a position of the Commission who will not be liable for the use of such information.