

EU consumers willing to pay for better animal welfare

EU consumers are willing to make an extra effort to buy animal welfare friendly products, even if this means changing where they shop or paying more for goods, according to a Eurobarometer survey on attitudes to animal welfare, published today. The report shows, however, that citizens feel they lack the necessary information to distinguish between products on animal welfare grounds. In the first EU survey on animal welfare to cover all 27 Member States, as well as Turkey and Croatia, 62% of respondents said that they would change their shopping habits in order to access more animal welfare friendly goods. The survey also revealed that citizens do not feel that they are provided with this option at the moment, due to insufficient information on animal welfare in food production. A large majority of respondents backed the idea of labelling or logos to indicate the animal welfare standards met in producing the foods they buy. The survey demonstrates general support for financially rewarding EU farmers who use better animal welfare practices.

Markos Kyprianou, Commissioner for Health, said "The message from EU citizens is clear – they view animal welfare as a priority and are willing to contribute to its promotion. The results of this survey are an affirmation of what the Commission is trying to achieve in the field of animal welfare and confirm that our efforts are a response to public demand for action in this area. The Commission attaches great importance to improving animal welfare both in the EU and internationally, and it is good to see that citizens support our efforts."

A priority for citizens

The Eurobarometer shows that animal welfare is an issue which EU citizens rank highly, giving it an 8 out of 10 on average in terms of importance. Most perceive that animal welfare has improved in their country over the last decade, although 77% still believe there is more to be done. Greeks (96%) Cypriots (91%) and Portuguese (90%) in particular would like more attention to be given to the wellbeing of animals in their country. The Eurobarometer also shows that citizens are in favour of further incentives to promote animal welfare in the EU. Over 70% of respondents supported the idea of financial rewards for producers who apply high animal welfare standards. There was also strong consensus (89%) that imports should have to be produced under the same animal welfare conditions as those originating in the EU.

Perceived benefits of animal welfare

In addition to the traditional ethical concerns that generate support for animal welfare, the wellbeing of animals during the production of food now appears to be strongly associated with the healthiness and quality of products. Over half of those surveyed perceived food produced in keeping with high animal welfare standards to be healthier than other food, while 48% said they thought it to be better quality.

More information needed

This link in people's minds between animal welfare and the quality and safety of food means that consumers are more inclined towards animal welfare friendly products. In last year's Eurobarometer¹, consumers said that they would be willing to pay more for food produced based on animal welfare practices, while the Eurobarometer published today indicates that they would even go so far as to change their shopping patterns. Nevertheless, over half of those surveyed felt that they had neither enough knowledge about the farming conditions in their country nor the information to differentiate good animal welfare products from others. When asked how animal welfare products should be distinguished in retail outlets, 39% were in favour of written information on the labels, 35% supported the idea of logos and 26% backed the use of a grading/star system on packaging. The Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006-2010 (see MEMO/06/21) foresees the establishment of standardised indicators for animal welfare and possibly an EU animal welfare label, while the German Presidency is hosting a conference on animal welfare labelling options on 28 March 2007.

For the Eurobarometer survey, see: URL

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/survey/index_en.htm

For more information on Animal Welfare, see:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/index_en.htm

For the labelling conference, see:

http://www.bmelv.de/clin_045/nn_757140/EN/08-AnimalWelfare/AnimalLabelling/_AnimalLabelling_node.html

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/euro_barometer25_en.pdf