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Breaking News on Prepared Food and Meat Processing

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Survey supports move to improve animal welfare

09/06/2005- **A new EU survey on consumer attitudes supports proposed legislation on improving the treatment of farm animals and the need for better labelling, according to the European Commission.**

The new [Eurobarometer survey](#) released yesterday also shows that 52 per cent of the EU's citizens said that they did not take animal welfare considerations into account when buying meat.

The survey also shows wide disparities among EU countries in concern for animal welfare. Overall about 74 per cent of consumers believe they can improve animal welfare through their shopping choices, and 57 per cent are willing to pay more for animal welfare-friendly food products. The poll also reveals consumers are concerned that such products are difficult to identify.

The survey results indicate that the European Commission should work on improving the labelling of "animal-friendly" products within the EU, said the health and consumer protection commissioner, Markos Kyprianou. He claimed the survey supports the Commission's programme to bring in a series of new directives requiring farmers to implement better welfare protection measures for their animals.

As the first in a series of planned measures, the Commission [said this week](#) that it will submit to the EU parliament a new directive outlining measures farmers will be required to take in improving the treatment of broiler chickens.

"European consumers clearly care about animal welfare and want to make informed purchasing choices," Kyprianou said in a statement. "Yet they feel hampered by a lack of information on which products are produced in an animal welfare friendly way. The Commission now intends to study how this can be done through new initiatives on labelling. The results of the survey also support the Commission's recent proposal on the welfare of broilers and will feed into our upcoming action plan on animal welfare."

According to the survey, 74 per cent of consumers agree that this could result in better animal welfare while 19 per cent do not. As an example, 57 per cent of consumers would be willing to pay an additional price premium for eggs sourced from more welfare friendly production systems, while 34 per cent would not.

About 32 per cent of consumers could never identify such welfare-friendly food products, while 19 per cent could identify such products only very rarely. Consumers generally believe that insufficient weight is given to animal welfare in their countries' agricultural policies with only seven per cent of respondents believing it was given too much importance.

The treatment of laying hens and broiler chickens come out on top as a major concern among consumers, followed by pigs, dairy cows and calves.

Respondents from Sweden (73 per cent), the Netherlands (66 per cent), Germany (65 per cent) and Belgium (62 per cent) were most vocal on the need to improve the welfare conditions of laying hens.

Respondents from Denmark (60 per cent) were the strongest advocates for more protection for pigs.

The European Commission also concluded that although people seem willing to accept a price increase for eggs sourced from an animal welfare friendly system, the increase is naturally limited, especially at price increase levels of 25 per cent or more. Citizens in most of the new member states and in the south of the EU appear to be more reluctant to accept a price increase.

"With regard to European consumers' perceptions of this issue, the results of this Eurobarometer reveal very distinct realities with regard to the welfare and protection of farm animals within the union," the Commission said. "This situation could partly be explained by differences in the production systems as well as in purchasing power. These differences are confirmed by gaps between the results observed in the north and the south of the European Union, but also between western and eastern countries."

The Eurobarometer opinion survey was carried out for the European Commission in February and March 2005 with an average of 1,000 respondents surveyed in each of the 25 EU member states. The Commission plans a follow-up survey to investigate consumer attitudes further and to extend the survey's scope to other countries such as Norway, Switzerland, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey.

The survey addresses consumer attitudes to the welfare of farmed animals, the influence of this on their food purchases and their perceptions of how animal welfare is dealt with in the EU.

The EU's Protocol on Protection and Welfare of Animals, in effect since 1999 under the Amsterdam Treaty, sets out the principles on animal welfare the European Commission is required to follow in implementing new directives on the issue.

Links of Interest:

- [EU Animal Welfare Site](#)
- [Eurobarometer Animal Welfare Survey \(PDF\)](#)

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