

Euro Coop Position Paper on Animal Welfare

February 2017

Introduction

Consumers are showing a growing interest in the conditions in which animals are reared, in the environmental impact of the final food product, as well as in the quality and the safety of food products. Specifically, a recent report published by the European Commission showed that 94% of EU citizens find it important to protect the welfare of farmed animals, and 82% believe that their welfare should be protected better than it is now¹. Euro Coop members consider animal welfare to be closely linked with sustainable development, a key priority for consumer co-operatives. As such, animal health and welfare are prominent aspects when it comes to animal husbandry, which is translated into consumer co-operatives actively supporting production methods that minimize animal suffering and allowing for the expression of the natural behaviour of animals.

Generally, consumer co-operatives are committed to following the Five Freedoms as laid down by the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes²:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from discomfort;
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease;
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour;
5. Freedom from fear and distress.

Euro Coop's active involvement in the field of animal health and welfare, in addition to the publication of the present Position Paper, is reflected by the Position Paper on antimicrobial resistance (AMR)³ published in November 2016 which urged all stakeholders to play their part in addressing this pressing public health threat, as well as by the Open Letter to the Commission which called for a reduction of antibiotics in livestock production back in 2013⁴. In addition, Euro Coop members have taken several initiatives in order to protect and promote animals' health and welfare. These initiatives will be further developed upon below; to summarize but a few:

- Consumer co-operatives are promoting and developing their (1) own brand range of organic products which in principle guarantee higher animal health and welfare standards compared to

¹ The European Commission report on "Attitudes of Europeans towards Animal Welfare" is available [here](#).

² Available [here](#).

³ Euro Coop's position paper on Antimicrobial Resistance is available [here](#).

⁴ Euro Coop's open letter to the Commission on the need for a reduction of antibiotics in livestock production is available [here](#).

conventional products, (2) products that clearly convey that animals were treated fairly, as well as (3) an own brand range of pet food that is made with natural ingredients and cruelty free;

- Creating **Farming Groups**, i.e. selected farms that focus on rearing animals to the high standards required by consumer co-operatives, often stricter than EU standards;
- Having **strict standards regarding the use of antibiotics**;
- **Prohibiting animal mutilation**;
- **Carrying out audits at suppliers' premises** to monitor that animals are treated adequately;
- Ensuring that **supply chains are as short as possible** and favouring local products so as to *inter alia* have a better overview of suppliers' practices.

Euro Coop is therefore eager to keep animal welfare high on the agenda, to be up to date on such issues, as well as to share best practices with other stakeholders. As such, Euro Coop warmly welcomes the European Commission's initiative to set up the **EU Platform on Animal Welfare**⁵ and has applied to be among its members.

This position paper describes in more detail the **commitment of consumer co-operatives to animal health and welfare**, as well as the steps that should be taken in order to **keep animal health and welfare high on the agenda and to phase out harmful practices**. Specifically, these include co-operation among stakeholders, raising consumers' awareness and providing the consumer with correct information, as well as addressing issues such as climate change and policy implications in a timely fashion.

Consumer co-operatives' commitment and active role in upholding animal health and welfare

Coop Denmark – Creating an own brand animal welfare label

Coop Denmark is **developing its own brand of products that will clearly signal its commitment towards promoting and supporting animal welfare**. Consumers are not fully pleased with the current animal welfare label present in Denmark as they believe that it is not ambitious enough. Therefore, Coop Denmark's own brand will be **more ambitious in terms of animal welfare requirements and product scope**. For instance, processed meat such as cold cuts will be included under this label. Both researchers and NGOs will be consulted during the development of these products⁶. Coop Denmark launched about a 100 products that bear this label in 2016, 500 more products will be added throughout 2017, and ultimately Coop Denmark plans to market 1000 products with this label.



Coop Denmark's animal welfare label. The more hearts are filled, the better the animal welfare.

⁵ More details on the EU Platform on Animal Welfare are available [here](#).

⁶ More information on Coop Denmark's new own brand range available [here](#).

Coop Italy – Informing consumers about animal friendly practices and creating a cruelty free own brand pet food range

Coop Italy believes that focusing on sustainability is primordial. Therefore, **animal welfare is a prominent factor when sourcing ingredients and developing new products**. As such, Coop Italy claims to currently be the most committed retailer in terms of protecting and assuring animal health and welfare at national level. Coop Italy considers animal health and welfare not only as means to improve animals' breeding conditions, but also as a way to improve their health and, consequently, the quality of the final product. Therefore, Coop Italy is very active in researching and developing new policies and projects that are aimed at continuously improving animal health and welfare⁷. Coop Italy is currently working on additional projects related to the promotion, preservation, and monitoring of animal health and welfare that will be unveiled during the course of 2017. As recognition for their work in the area of animal welfare, Coop Italy won the [Compassion in World Farming](#) award in 2012.

Coop Italy recognises consumers' increasing concerns regarding animal health and welfare, but finds that consumers are often misinformed as to the practices that are feasible on the ground in the context of animal husbandry and in the context of the production of a specific product. Therefore, Coop Italy is committed to **provide consumers with the best possible information regarding sustainable and animal-friendly practices**, as well as raising consumers' awareness in this respect.

In addition, Coop Italy has gone one step further by creating the own brand range "**amici speciali**" [special friends]⁸ that ensures the wellbeing of pets. This range is made with the same care and values that characterise all own brand coop products, particularly with regards to the ingredients used – no dyes or preservatives – as well as in terms of the controls that are carried out along the supply chain. Moreover, products in the "amici speciali" range are **cruelty free**, i.e. animal experiments are not allowed.

Coop Netherlands – Labelling products to convey their positive animal welfare status

Coop Netherlands is active on several fronts when it comes to animal welfare and is committed to signalling its commitment to consumers via different labels. For instance, Coop Netherlands is developing an increasing number of cold cuts and pork products that qualify to **bear the "better life" stars label**. These stars measure animals' welfare during life; the more stars the better, up to a maximum of three stars.



The label "**pluim garantie**" [feather warrantee] on chicken products signals that the chicken comes from a slower growing breed, that it is not fed growth promoters and that living conditions are adequate. Finally, organic and free-range eggs sold at Coop Netherlands come from hens living in natural condition and eating natural feed.



The eggs therefore qualify for the "**blij kip-garantie**" [happy hen guarantee label].⁹

⁷ More information on the general take of Coop Italy on animal health and welfare issues is available [here](#), while a specific overview of animal health and welfare issues is available [here](#).

⁸ More information on this pet-friendly range is available [here](#).

⁹ More information on Coop Netherlands' commitment to animal welfare is available [here](#).

Coop Norway & S Group (Finland) – Prioritizing, promoting and developing organic products

Coop Norway and the S Group in Finland are both firm supporters of organic products and organic production, arguing that animal welfare is one of the main reasons to choose for organic products. Indeed, **not only are animal welfare standards more stringent, but organic products are also natural and authentic**. Coop Norway continuously develops its own organic brand range, and sales for organic products have increased by 20.3% only last year¹⁰. In Finland, consumers plan to increase the use of organic food, of which they can find more than 3100 products at the S Group¹¹. In addition, 97% of the S Group's fresh meat sales are of domestic origin, and carefully monitored given that the S Group conducts regular animal welfare audits, including slaughterhouse audits. Organic meat sales were strong in 2016 at the S Group, where they increased by about 20% compared to the previous year.

Coop Sweden – Stricter animal welfare requirements than required by EU law

Coop Sweden prioritises Swedish meat for its own brand products and has become almost self-sufficient in this respect, with 97% of meat used in its own brand products coming from Sweden. Meat imported from outside of Sweden, as well as local meat used in own brand products **is subject to animal welfare requirements that go beyond EU legislation**. For instance, Coop Sweden does not accept routine mutilation of animals. As such, tail docking is permitted if and only if all other measures have already been taken in order to prevent tail biting. Coop Sweden also does not allow force feeding and pays particular attention to the fact that antibiotic use is reduced to a minimum. Specifically, antibiotics should never be used for growth promotion and sick animals must be treated individually. Coop Sweden's animal welfare requirements are followed up with audits of slaughterhouses and primary producers¹².

The Co-operative Group (United Kingdom) – Farming Groups

The Co-operative Group is historically very active in the area of animal welfare. Since the 1990s, own brand eggs displayed on their package the living conditions of the hens. In 2008, the Co-operative Group became the first convenience retailer to only make use of free range own-brand eggs.

The Co-operative Group not only supports animal welfare through schemes such as the Red Tractor, but has also developed its own brand animal welfare standards. The Co-op Farming Groups were developed as part of these standards. The Co-operative Group supports about 2000 UK farmers and has built long-term relationships with about 400 of them, who are part of the so called **Farming Groups and produce to the standards required by the Co-operative Group**, who works closely with these farmers to monitor and improve animal health and welfare, as well as to address any potential environmental and ethical issues. Farming Groups have so far been created for milk, chicken, pork, beef, lamb, eggs and turkey. A pillar model has been developed to evaluate farms that are part of the Farming Groups and to give farmers an incentive to constantly improve animal welfare standards.

¹⁰ More information on Coop Norway's policy on organic meat is available [here](#).

¹¹ More information on the S Group's stance on organic foods is available [here](#).

¹² More information on Coop Sweden's requirements on animal welfare is available [here](#).

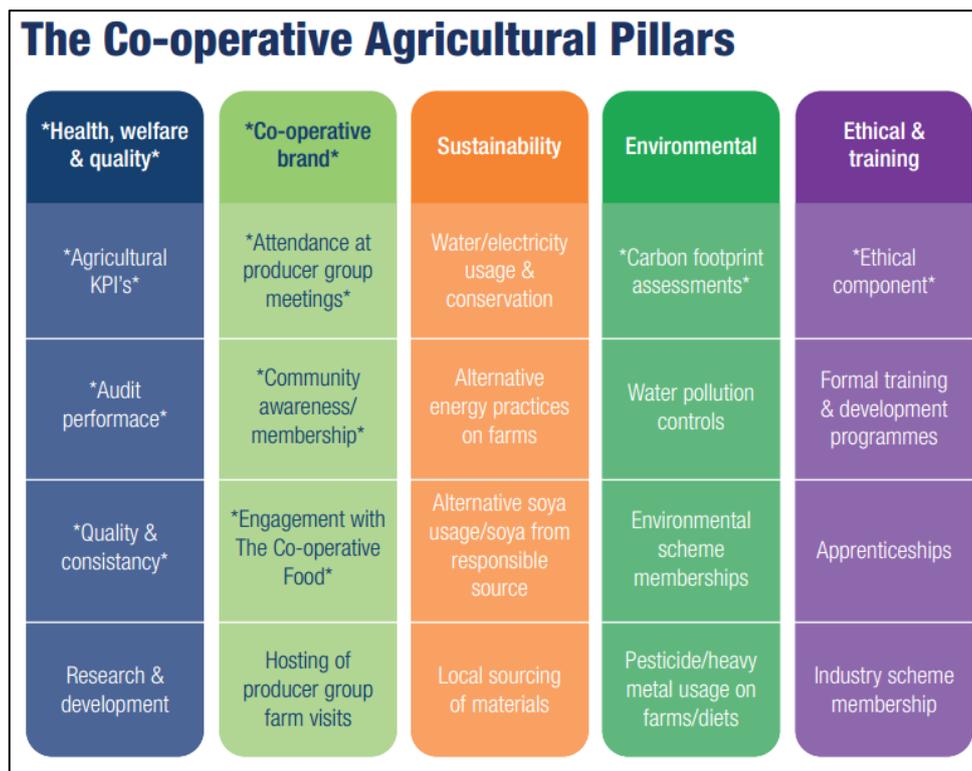


Image adapted from the co-operative Group's website¹³. All farms must meet the Co-op's the first two pillars, i.e. health, welfare and quality, and co-operative brand standards. However, as farms progress through the three additional pillars, i.e. sustainability, environmental concerns, and ethical components, they become bronze, silver, or gold farms and receive a premium for every additional level.

The Co-operative Group's detailed policy on animal health and welfare is explained in detail in an easy-to-understand booklet that is available to the public at large¹⁴.

Protecting animal welfare – Now and in the future

Consumers are increasingly concerned with how animals are treated along the food supply chain, and take a growing interest in knowing how, where, and with which ingredients the food they eat was produced. Consequently, Euro Coop members are very much involved and interested in animal health and welfare, including in the public health threat that is represented by antimicrobial resistance. Euro Coop members prioritize this issue by incorporating the protection and the promotion of animal welfare in their sustainability policies, by raising awareness on the matter, by providing adequate information to consumers, as well as by developing own brand products that answer to consumers' concerns. Animal health and welfare should be a priority for all stakeholders in the years to come, by concentrating on the issues outlined below.

Co-operation between stakeholders

Consumer co-operatives are self-evidently big supporters of co-operation, not only within their community, but also between co-operatives and other stakeholders. **The case of animal welfare is a crucial example of an issue in which stakeholders from different domains and backgrounds can learn from each other.** Indeed, sharing lessons learned and best practices among stakeholders is key;

¹³ Please find the image of the Co-operative Agricultural Pillars [here](#).

¹⁴ Animal welfare policy and policy position statements of the Co-operative Group are available [here](#).

examples of relevant actors including academia, scientists, animal rights activists, farmers, retailers, consumers, and many more.

Therefore, Euro Coop **welcomes the call for the EU Platform on Animal Welfare**, which will provide for a physical platform in which stakeholders will be able to exchange on best practices, policy developments, and innovative research.

Educating consumers on animal health and welfare

Consumer co-operatives differentiate themselves from other retailers through seven co-operative principles¹⁵. One of these principles focuses on education, training, and information, specifically of consumers. Efforts in this respect should be paramount as **consumers have the right to be adequately informed about animal practices used from farm to fork**. Almost 90% of EU citizens believe that information campaigns on animal welfare are a good way to influence the attitudes of young people towards animals. In addition, two-thirds of the EU citizens surveyed want to have more information about the conditions in which farmed animals are treated¹⁶. Consumers should *inter alia* be aware that producing animal products at a larger scale inevitably entails that animals do not live as if they were in a natural state. Notwithstanding, upholding animal health and welfare to the maximum that is possible in the context of animal husbandry is a must, for the animal, for the environment, and for consumers.

In addition to potential education campaigns on the matter, useful information tools for consumers are package labelling, the display of information on the company's website and new technologies such as apps and QR codes. Consumer co-operatives are already using these tools in order to communicate about the conditions of the animals that were reared in order to produce eggs, meat and/or dairy products. **More information and research is required with regards to the effectiveness of the different types of communication tools** currently used in this context in order to maximise consumers' understanding of these labels. It would also be useful to **investigate whether an animal welfare label at EU level would have an added value**.

Developing own brand ranges and products

Consumer co-operatives' own brands products have become a guarantee of quality, safety, and affordable prices for consumers. In addition, consumer co-operatives are committed to answering to the increasing consumers' interest in environmental issues, animal welfare, organics and the consumption of local products. Almost 60% of EU citizens are willing to pay more for products that were made following animal welfare-friendly processes and more than 50% of Europeans look for animal welfare-friendly labels when grocery shopping¹⁷. As such, consumer co-operatives develop and build upon own brand products that answer to the aforementioned consumer concerns. As explained above, Coop Denmark has for instance created its very own animal welfare label that foresees stricter requirements compared to those of the national label.

¹⁵ The seven co-operative principles are: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; Member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; Co-operation among co-operatives; and concern for the community. More information available [here](#).

¹⁶ Data from the European Commission report on "Attitudes of Europeans towards Animal Welfare" which is available [here](#).

¹⁷ Data from the European Commission report on "Attitudes of Europeans towards Animal Welfare" which is available [here](#).

Therefore, **the role played by own brands should be further developed in order to give consumers an even greater choice of products that have the characteristics that they are looking for**, be it that it is organically produced, that it bears a strict animal welfare label, or that it is produced locally.

Developments and challenges for animal health and welfare

Consumer co-operatives are concerned about sustainability in general, climate change, and about the impact of human and animal activity on the environment. Scientific consensus has been reached regarding the fact that climate change is one of the most important environmental threats that we are faced with today. Rearing animals leads to a production of greenhouse gases that is contributing to climate change. Therefore, it is imperative to research, develop and implement sustainable practices in the context of animal husbandry. However, these practices should absolutely not result in a negative impact on either animal welfare or animal health.

As such, it should become standard practice to include animal health and welfare on scientific research and policy decisions taken in order to address climate change and environmental concerns. Specifically, agricultural systems that protect both animal welfare as well as the environment have to be promoted and applied.

Conclusion

Consumer co-operatives have integrated the promotion and protection of animal health and welfare in their sustainability policies. Animal health and welfare issues are therefore high on the agenda of consumer co-operatives, which is reflected by inter alia the commitment to reduce to a minimum the use of antibiotics, to eliminate animal mutilation as much as possible, and to actively monitor suppliers' practices. Consumer co-operatives are also active in educating and informing the consumer with regards to the conditions of reared animals. Furthermore, consumer co-operatives are developing own brand products that respect strict animal welfare requirements, as well as further developing their own brand organic range in the interest of increased animal welfare.

Issues linked to animal health and welfare must remain high on the agenda in the years to come. For this purpose, stakeholders in the sector should be encouraged to co-operate among each other and share best practices. Also, it is essential to educate consumers with regards to practices used in animal husbandry as well as providing adequate information, perhaps via package labels.

The environmental threats that we are faced with should also be taken into consideration in this context. Indeed, animal husbandry exacerbates climate change and it is therefore imperative to devote resources in exploring how to reduce the negative effects of animal rearing on the environment without negatively impacting animal health and welfare.

About Euro Coop

Euro Coop is the voice of the co-operative retailers in Europe. Our associations brings together the national associations of consumer co-operatives in **19 European countries**, which represent **4,500 local/regional co-operatives**, **employing 500,000 citizens** across Europe and operating **36,000 stores** which serve **32 million consumer-members** daily. Euro Coop's members together are Europe's second strongest retail force – accounting for € 76 billion in annual turnover from sales.

Euro Coop's Secretariat in Brussels represents the interests of its members before the European Institutions and facilitates the inter-member exchange between the national associations. More information is available at www.eurocoop.coop.

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