



The Danish Animal Ethics Council

Statement on market-driven animal welfare

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The Danish Animal Ethics Council
Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark
Slotsholmsgade 12
1216 Copenhagen K
detdyreetiskeraad@mfvm.dk
www.detdyreetiskeraad.dk

Only the summary has been translated.
[The full statement is available \(in Danish\) here.](#)

Summary

Purpose of this statement

With this statement, the Danish Animal Ethics Council wants to point out ways to promote the welfare of farmed animals through the interaction between consumer demand and the supply of animal products where special consideration has been given to animal welfare. The aim is thus to improve the welfare of farmed animals by strengthening the part of livestock production where animal welfare requirements go beyond the legal minimum requirements.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council believes that it is still extremely important to maintain the work to strengthen the legislative minimum requirements for animal welfare that apply to all livestock production but must acknowledge that there are limits to what can be achieved this way. At the same time, a number of competing agendas are seen within so-called political consumption, such as ensuring healthy and climate-friendly products, and the marketing of these have indirectly put pressure on the market for products made with specific regard for animal welfare. In this situation the Danish Animal Ethics Council believes that it is important to focus on market-driven animal welfare, so that animal welfare maintains and strengthens its position as a value in the market for quality food.

Background

Since the start of discussions on animal welfare in the 1960s and 1970s, the welfare of farm animals has mainly been driven by two different strategies: the establishment of basic legislative requirements for animal welfare, and the production and sale of animal products with specific focus on animal welfare. These two mechanisms have so far supplemented and mutually influenced each other. Stricter legislative requirements have led to higher standards for alternative products, and at the same time alternative production has shown new ways which, in several cases, have later been translated into legislative requirements in conventional production. Where the strategy with legislative requirements has primarily focused on ensuring animals a minimum level of animal welfare, including not least protecting them from unnecessary suffering, the strategy with market-driven animal welfare creates an incentive to improve the level of welfare beyond this minimum.

There are special animal products on the market focusing primarily on animal welfare. However, the trend is that an increasing number of such animal welfare friendly products have a broader focus on ethical responsibility, with animal welfare as just one of several qualities. This trend is also seen in the growing market for organic products.

Sociological studies indicate that many people want better animal welfare for farm animals. However, responses in opinion surveys do not always fully correspond with the behaviour shown in food consumption. Where some studies indicate that consumers themselves believe they have good knowledge about conditions in production, other studies suggest that consumers when facing the shelves in supermarkets can still find it difficult to determine under which conditions the animals have lived.

Many of the requirements for keeping animals in EU countries are set by EU regulations which require that member states ensure compliance with certain minimum requirements. In some areas, individual countries can set or maintain stricter requirements in national legislation. EU regulation thus contributes to standardizing the conditions for production with regard to ensuring animal welfare but it does not cover countries outside the EU from which many food products are imported. There may thus be major differences in the regulations imposed on production in Denmark, other EU countries, and countries outside the EU, and thereby also great differences in the welfare for the animals used in production. Private businesses can choose to set their own standards with more extensive requirements for animal welfare than the legal requirements, and they can either themselves or through a third-party check whether these requirements are being met.

Globalisation has had a major impact on the supply of food products. Although in recent decades there has been a development of both national and international regulation to protect animals against too poor conditions and consumers against misleading information, and even though the market can offer more animal-welfare-friendly products than previously, globalisation also means that, in many cases, it is even more difficult for consumers to determine the conditions under which the animals have lived. If consumers are to be able to identify which foreign products meet Danish standards, EU standards or private-label standards, this must of course be stated on the product's label, which is not always the case.

Development areas for market-driven animal welfare

In general, the Danish Animal Ethics Council finds that the topic of market-driven animal welfare is complex and involves challenges with no simple answers. However, the Council also believes that, viewed from four different angles, several possibilities can be identified for developing the market for food produced with a special focus on animal welfare. These four angles, which serve to structure the review in this statement, are: supply, demand, transparency and priorities.

- **Supply:** Clearly, the first prerequisite for consumers to be able to buy food produced with a special focus on animal welfare is that the products are available. There is a very big difference in the number of alternatives offered for different kinds of products. There may also be large regional differences in the supply of products. The Council calls for the development of new products, not only with regard to basic food such as meat, but very much also with regard to more processed products. The Council further points out that it is necessary to increase the availability of alternative products. In this context, the Council is not just thinking about retail supply, but also availability in public and private businesses, such as those responsible for canteen operations and school meals, as well as cafés, restaurants and the fast-food sector. The Council also sees a large, and so far, unexploited potential related to marketing and consumer information. Furthermore, the Council calls for a focus on the price of the products and on the possibility of financial support in the development phase.
- **Demand:** The Danish Animal Ethics Council considers it vital to increase consumer demand for products with focus on animal welfare. The Council points out that, in this context, the concept of "consumers" should be understood in a broad sense and cover everyone responsible for buying food of animal origin for private households, for public and private institutions, and for businesses. The Council believes that

consumers have a great responsibility that they must take on in order to be more aware of what they buy. The Council also calls for initiatives to increase knowledge about production methods and about animal welfare in general. Here, the Council points out that consumers must seek out the information available, and that the relevant stakeholders have to ensure that the information is easily accessible, both about products and as general background knowledge.

- *Transparency:* It is crucial for the consumer's knowledge of and perception of a product that the relevant information is easy to find and understand. However, in many cases, it may be difficult to determine under which conditions the animals have been kept. The Council believes that efforts should be made to ensure that consumers can easily access information about animal welfare in food production, and that the information should be correct and credible. The Council believes that the responsibility for ensuring the availability of credible information lies with both producers, processors, retailers and the authorities. The Council does not believe there should be more labels on the market, but it recommends improving existing labelling schemes and developing supplementary labelling and information methods. The Council further points out that misleading information must be avoided and that it should be ensured that the production meets the requirements promised by the label. In this regard, the Council sees a particular challenge for the transparency of imported products.
- *Priorities:* The Council finds that there is a need to ensure and promote that animal welfare is high on the priority list together with other important agendas such as climate, quality, health and price. The Council points out that the animal-welfare qualities of a product risk drowning in other highlighted qualities unless specific focus on the topic is maintained. The Council believes that the responsibility for ensuring and promoting animal welfare as a priority rests with all stakeholders in the food sector. The Council recommends making animal welfare more visible as a quality of a product and that animal welfare may be integrated into other quality labels. Moreover, the Council urges businesses to incorporate animal welfare into their ethical values, and consumers to explore the possibilities to change their habits. Finally, the Council believes there is a need for increased attention to the limitations of legislation, the potential of market forces and the impact of globalisation.

Overall, the Danish Animal Ethics Council concludes that none of the initiatives described above can stand alone. The Council believes there is a need for a broad approach to promote market-driven animal welfare.



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