Implementation of the broiler welfare directive from an industry perspective

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The European poultry production consist of 9,4 million tons broiler meat, 1,8 million tons turkey meat and 0,5 million tons duck meat.

Directive 2007/43/EC, adopted on 28th of June 2007, lays down minimum rules for the protection of chickens kept for meat production and had to be implemented at the latest by 30 June 2010. The Directive addressed to Member States (MSs) is the result of the discussion of the proposal presented by the European Commission (EC) in 2005. In the text is clearly indicated the framework of the Directive by referring to the Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes, drawn up on the basis of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes and Recommendation concerning domestic fowl (Gallus gallus) which includes additional provisions for poultry kept for meat production. With reference to the report of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare of 21 March 2000 on the Welfare of Chickens Kept for Meat Production it is explained that fast growing rate and high stocking density may be addressed in way which is improving the welfare level of poultry.

Minimum rules are laid down and MSs remain free to take more stringent measures. The European poultry industry has advocated a regulation and not a directive since a regulation might better ensure against a non uniform implementation. The functioning of the internal market may be put under pressure by the subsidiarity principle. Stricter rules especially with regard to stocking density and monitoring of welfare indicators and difference in passing on the costs of inspection may disturb the level playing field between poultry businesses across the EU-27 (EU). The Directive does not apply to holdings with less than 500 chickens or breeder stock, hatcheries, and extensive indoor, free range and organically reared chicken. The Directive lays down requirements and conditions related to the stocking density, light and climate in the house, monitoring and inspection on the farm and in slaughterhouse, qualification and training of farmers and infringements and penalties.

Measures necessary to ensure the uniform implementation of this Directive may be adopted. In some MSs a discussion came up with regard to the definition of useable area, calculation of cumulative mortality rate, control and recording of climate in the house, the feed withdrawal period and the introduction of the monitoring of welfare indicators.

The foreseen report of the Commission on a harmonized mandatory scheme of welfare labeling poultrymeat will be embedded in the general animal welfare policy. The report concerning the influence of genetic parameters on identified deficiencies resulting in poor welfare of chickens has been delayed till the second half of 2012. In 2013 a report is expected concerning the application of this Directive and its influence on the welfare of chickens, as well as the development of welfare indicators.

The European market is interesting for international trade of poultrymeat both for imports (2010: 0,8 million tons) and exports (2010: 1 million tons). European producers have to comply with the Directive 2007/43. According to WTO rules the EU-27 cannot impose
animal welfare standards on imports, but has the opportunity to do so by including application of animal welfare standards in bilateral trade agreements with third countries. Discussion in OIE on international broiler welfare standards show that different views on broiler welfare.