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JOINT STATEMENT

EFSA Scientific Opinion on broilers on farms: the roadmap to unsustainable poultry production in Europe

Today, EFSA released its scientific opinion on broilers and laying hens based on a particularly narrow mandate on animal welfare set by the European Commission. Consequentially, EFSA's opinion contains unprecedented recommendations which, if applied in these terms, would simply lead to the loss of most of the European poultry sector, meat and eggs combined.

Among the key recommendations put forward by EFSA, the most shocking is the proposal to lower the stock density for conventional broilers to a maximum of 11kg/m². In other words, if applied, this would mean that the EU will request conventional poultry producers to make major on-farm investments while the number of birds in a barn will have to be decreased by 72%. Similar recommendations are made for laying hens in the EFSA opinion.

This and other proposals will require high investments to be made by farmers, disregarding loans taken to comply with rules established before 2012 and still not fully recovered. Implementing such extreme proposals would result in closing small and medium enterprises in rural areas, losing competitiveness, and increasing imports, while facing a massive increase in the price of poultry meat for consumers!

On the other hand, whilst we recognise the huge efforts to compile scientific literature, the opinion also lacks an explanation of current breeding strategies and programs. The potential of balanced breeding and genetics for positive and better welfare is not fully recognised and the opinion focuses mostly on management measures to "solve" welfare issues. The work done so far by the poultry breeders, producers and industry should be further acknowledged. It is missing recent scientific literature to back-up these kinds of improvements already developed in the sector.

We acknowledge that EFSA scientists could not address other fields than that of animal welfare and could not tackle, for instance, the socio-economic impact that these recommendations will have, nor the sustainability aspects that were out of the scope as framed by the European Commission's request. In the end, the questions that remain to be answered is how all this will be financed and how much time will be provided to make the potential transition? What will be the combined effects of these proposals when gathered with the other legislative texts that are already being discussed at EU level? Ultimately, how will EU producers resist fierce international competition that does not apply such high on-farm standards?

As a result of the Commission's framing, this opinion does not compare on-farm animal welfare practices in the EU with third countries. Since there is no mechanism today to prevent poultry imports from third countries with lower on-farm animal welfare standards, this would simply lead to a higher increase of imports of poultry meat from Ukraine, Brazil, and Thailand; an already existing trend.

We strongly encourage the European Commission to fill the gaps to avoid compromising on the socio-economic sustainability and animal welfare conditions in the EU.

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