

The Letter for LESS and BETTER

for livestock farming in the Grand Est

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Anne Vonesch

This 3rd letter on livestock issues deals with animal welfare. All too often, the different areas are dealt with in a compartmentalised way: animal feed, impact on water and air, carbon footprint, biosecurity, performance, etc. What animals experience and feel is 'out of the picture'. We advocate **decompartmentalisation and coherence**.

The latest Eurobarometer reveals that **92% of French people believe that the welfare of farm animals should be better protected**. The European Citizens' Initiative for the abolition of cages (all species) was validated with 1.4 million signatures. Following this, the European Commission's commitment to revise all the relevant regulations seemed to be a fine demonstration of democracy. But today, in the light of an incomprehensible postponement, the disappointment is profound. This in no way prevents the various players from taking the relevant initiatives in terms of investment and farm advisory services! Crises, societal changes, everything is accelerating. "Business as usual" has become sinister. We're heading straight for the wall. **So let's think ahead, so we don't have to regret certain investments!**

Sociologists are well aware of the **wide variety of relationships between farmers and their animals** (technicality, domination, pleasure, affection, bonding, shared suffering, denial, exhaustion, fear of the future, etc.). It's up to us here to say a few words about **the formatting of agricultural advice** over the last half-century. It focuses on productivity, performance and lower production costs. The Grand Est Chamber of Agriculture is also introducing the importance of animal welfare, and its link with performance. This helps to convince farmers. But it is very worrying that certain so-called environmental approaches are moving in the direction of intensification. Compulsory training in animal welfare will have to adjust benchmarks and pass on up-to-date knowledge about distress, the violence of deprivation, the physiological and behavioural, emotional and cognitive needs of animals and also their positive emotions: their social links, their need to explore and act on their environment, their expressions... going far beyond the health aspect. Support should aim **"as good as possible", not "as bad as allowed"**.

So, if we respect the meaning of the term 'welfare' (without distorting it in a minimalist sense), **it will cost more to produce**. Farmers will undoubtedly sign up - provided they get a good price. So we need to take action on price formation, commercial practices, consumption and the organisation of the supply chain. This is essential, given that the current system is too unfair, cruel and even suicidal. We'll come back to this later. Hence our proposal to build the **"Information for Future"**. Indeed, how can we do a good job on the "Farms of the Future" if marketing continues to create confusion and sabotage fair prices, and if advertising pushes people to consume a lot of livestock products, when it is imperative to reduce their consumption?

A few examples to illustrate that things are being done, but there is still a long way to go:

Modernising the **ventilation** of broiler buildings alleviates certain suffering (diseases, pododermatitis, etc.) but does not obviate the need to reduce **animal density**. **Modern cattle buildings** may be very well designed, but they are no substitute for **grazing**. Improved **hygiene** for dairy calves does not break their solitude or compensate for the loss of their **mother**. Successful 'free-range' rearing of **adult laying hens** requires, among other things, better living conditions for **young pullets**. **Vaccines** reduce the need for **antibiotics**, but do not remove the chronic stress and other health risks associated with concentrated mass production and transport that spread infectious agents.

What animal welfare criteria should be applied to subsidies?

The problem is that current farm subsidies are not, or not sufficiently, discriminatory to encourage the adoption of ambitious practices and systems. When eligible applications are selected on the basis of a points system, this does not take into account the actual quality of the specifications. Aid for young farmers, for investment, or to support mixed farming (crops and livestock), ignore animal welfare (with the exception of organic farming and the Biosecurity-Animal Welfare Pact). It is difficult to know what type of farming and what level of animal welfare is being subsidised.

If we want to formulate the relevant criteria in a single sentence, we can say that they are the criteria of the organic farming specifications. They are well thought out: no cages, double or triple the minimum surface area compared to conventional farming, access to the open air (even if it's a small yard), comfortable bedding, later weaning, healthy feed, limited mutilation, with the aim of respecting the physiology and behaviour of the species. **A strong reason to support organic farming!**

The EFSA's recent and ongoing scientific reports ([see website](#)) look at the welfare of virtually all farm animal species, transport and killing. The scientific recommendations are therefore available. It turns out that current legislation and practices are totally obsolete.

All support for livestock farming (including the MAEC mixed farming scheme and agricultural methanisation) should include an assessment of animal welfare with an improvement process based on current EFSA recommendations or organic specifications, and not on current minimum standards which are completely out of date.

Here are some ideas for **developing relevant, credible criteria**. There are **3 types**:

1) Red lines: no subsidies for that!

- ➔ It is already necessary to ensure **compliance** with the regulations (minimum standards) in force:
 - **no aid** (of any kind, including for methanisation) for pig farms that cut off tails and do not provide optimal handling materials for pigs.
- ➔ Then there is the exclusion of practices recognised as having a particularly high impact:
 - **no aid for any system of cages and individual fixings** (sows in cages during maternity and early gestation, calves, hens, poultry breeders, rabbits, quails, ducks, tethered cattle, etc.)
 - **no aid for fully slatted floors** with no bedding area
 - **no aid for the foie gras sector** (pre-agronomic production prohibited in organic farming)
- ➔ Ambiguous cases combining different systems, or ruminants with zero grazing, or certain difficulties in mountain areas, could be negotiated on the basis of a **transition project**.

2) General criteria for free-range and processing LESS and BETTER

- ➔ **In general, support for free-range farming is highly desirable** (e.g. free-range chicken), although there are reservations about very large poultry buildings or fictitious free-range systems.
- ➔ **Improving existing systems is very important.** Here are some priorities:
 - **sows: move from cages in the maternity unit to free farrowing** (with litter for nest building) while giving priority as far as possible to group suckling and access to the open air
 - **all pigs: switch from full slatted floors to plain (or partially slatted) floors with a litter zone**, ensuring **optimal handling materials, lower density, and compliance with the ban on tail docking**
 - all pigs: add outdoor courts and/or runs
 - **poultry (all systems): add a veranda** to the building (without increasing density!)
 - **standard chickens: switch to 'European Chicken Commitment'** specifications (lower density)
 - switch from cattle fattening in stalls to **grazing**
 - dairy production, cows and goats, reintroduce/develop **grazing, extensify**
 - as required, **improve housing** for ruminants, particularly calves
 - ensure the widespread use of **anaesthesia AND analgesia** for all painful operations

3) Innovation criteria to develop exemplary projects

- review the fate of **male dairy calves**, develop good fattening conditions and, in particular, innovative practice to keep the calves on the dairy farms where they are born
- develop **grass-fed fattening for heifers and steers** (less industrial milk production), on pasture
- install **free-range pigs**, why not with photovoltaic systems
- develop **on-farm slaughtering** - a potential job-creating industry