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Government advisors think livestock production is not fit for future

Report Categories:

Agricultural Situation

Agriculture in the News

Agriculture in the Economy

Livestock and Products

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Report Highlights:

The Scientific Advisory Board for agricultural policy has presented their study titled ‘towards a socially accepted animal husbandry’ to the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture. The scientists came to the conclusion that the current housing conditions in livestock production were not fit for the future. This has further fueled the public debate about the future of animal husbandry in Germany.

General Information:

The Scientific Advisory Board for agricultural policy in Germany has published its study titled 'towards a socially accepted animal husbandry' on March 25, 2015. After three years of work, the main recommendations of the scientists are that livestock and poultry need to have access to enough space with different climate zones. Of high importance is especially that animals are able to access an outdoor environment. The housing conditions should also supply areas with different floor conditions, species-appropriate activities, food and care. Socially accepted husbandry should also abandon amputations, drastically reduce the use of antibiotics and apply stricter controls according to animal welfare indicators. The scientists also call for greater emphasis on functional traits in animal breeding. General conclusion of the 425 page report is that a large part of the livestock production in Germany is currently not fit for the future. For more information (in German) please see:

http://www.bmel.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/Ministerium/Beiraete/Agrarpolitik/GutachtenNutztierhaltung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

The publication of the study has further fueled the public debate about the future of animal husbandry in Germany. Peter Bleser, Parliamentary State Secretary of the AgMinistry welcomed the findings of the study. He announced that the study will be evaluated and included in animal welfare projects of the ministry. Bleser underlined that the goal of all stakeholders is to ensure that livestock are doing better in the future. For NGO's and others, the study confirmed their criticism of so-called factory farming. Anton Hofreiter, Chairman of the Green Party in the German Parliament, declared that the study makes it now official that the current industrial farming policy has failed.

However, the study was heavily criticized by representatives of agriculture for being not objective. Bernhard Krüskens, General Secretary of the German Farmers Union (DBV), and Henning Ehlers, General Secretary of the Association of Agricultural Cooperatives (DRV), were surprised since the recommendations have been an integral part in research and also in private-sector projects for years. These knowledge needs to be put into practice. For example, more space and species-appropriate activities are cornerstones of an animal-welfare initiative that was just launched recently. Ehlers also added that the recommendations can lead to the impression that the market economy should be replaced by planned economy. He underlined that Germany has the highest animal welfare standards worldwide.

The public debate about the future of animal husbandry in Germany has been going on for years. In particular, animal welfare has become the buzzword. The animal welfare initiative has shown that it has already become a common goal for all actors in the sector. For the first time, the German food industry has now formed an alliance to respond to the ongoing criticism on animal husbandry. Farmers, the meat industry and retailers want to set higher animal welfare standards by launching the Animal Welfare Initiative (AWI). The Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture will support the AWI implementation. AWI registration for farmers has started on April 1 in Germany. For more information about the German Animal Welfare Initiative please see:

http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Broad%20Initiative%20to%20increase%20Animal%20Welfare_Berlin_Germany_8-6-2014.pdf

However, implementation of national standards prior to EU-wide standards could hurt the competitiveness of German farmers. Short-term changes in regulation can also very quickly lead to the

relocation of livestock production to other countries. So, there are trade-related effects arising from the German animal welfare movement.

First, within the EU, implementation of national standards prior to the EU puts German farmers at a cost disadvantage. Germany's pork and poultry industry has expanded dramatically in the past decade, fueled by exports. The industry's ability to mitigate costs while still meeting new standards poses a challenge. This has been also laid down in the coalition agreement of the German government. It says that the government's aim is to enforce EU wide uniform and higher animal welfare standards.

Secondly, longer-term, there is the real possibility that today's animal rights standards will become tomorrow's trade restrictions. Clearly, animal welfare has become an important political topic in Germany and in the run up to elections in the fall of 2013 the Green Party has made it a campaign issue. The Green Party's main initiative is restricting large scale animal operations, which are portrayed as having more animal welfare problems than smaller farms.

A key characteristic of the German animal welfare discussion is also that it has become a comprehensive discussion with every single sector involved. Poultry, pork and egg production have been in the discussion for years. Just lately, dairy production has also become a topic since Aldi, Germany's leading discounter, demands to know from its suppliers the percentage of dairy cows kept in tethering housing.