

State animal husbandry label



Background

In June 2022, Federal Minister of Food and Agriculture Cem Özdemir presented the key points for a state animal husbandry label, which is intended to future-proof German agriculture. The label will provide transparency and clarity regarding the way animals are reared and enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions. Following proposals by his predecessors Christian Schmidt and Julia Klöckner, this was the third time that the feasibility of implementing a state animal husbandry label was debated. With the resolution passed by the Bundestag on 16 June 2023 and the final session of the Bundesrat on 7 July 2023, both the Bundestag and the Bundesrat have approved a national mandatory animal husbandry label. The husbandry label includes five types of husbandry: indoor housing; indoor+space; indoor with fresh air; outdoor runs/pasture; and organic. Initially, the legislation will only apply to the pig fattening process, but according to the Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture it will soon be expanded to cover all animal species, other segments of the supply chain, the restaurant and catering sector, and the entire animal life cycle. The option of a voluntary label for foreign animal products was also created.



Our position

The REWE Group supports the resolution implementing a mandatory animal husbandry label that provides clear information about how animals are reared if they are used in products eaten by consumers. Clearly declaring this information can serve as a useful basis for transforming the agricultural sector to ensure robust animal husbandry practices in Germany. The objective should be to involve all stakeholders in order to develop a comprehensive approach that is efficient, sustainable, and in the interest of all concerned.

This means, in particular, paying more attention to established private market solutions, such as the Animal Welfare Initiative, the retail industry's husbandry label, as well as the existing animal welfare programmes established by retailers and other private standards organisations. As a founding member of the Animal Welfare Initiative, we have advocated for an industry-wide approach to improving animal welfare standards since 2015 and actively support the agricultural sector in its efforts to improve the conditions in its stalls beyond the legal requirements. During the course of our long and close collaboration with farmers, scientific research, and NGOs, and by engaging in a dialogue with stakeholders throughout the sector, we have gained much insight into what an effective animal husbandry label should look like. The criteria and inspection processes that have been worked out must be integrated into the national regulations.

We believe the federal government when it says it is working quickly to expand the animal husbandry label legislation to other areas, like the production and rearing of piglets, as well as other sales channels, such as restaurants and catering businesses. To date, however, there are still many gaps that need to be closed before a holistic approach to transforming and future-proofing the animal husbandry sector can be taken. Not only must adjustments to construction and pollution control law be considered more closely, but a realistic financing plan – including the use of state funds – must be drawn up that goes beyond the initial capital of 1 billion euros. Because over the long term, in addition to the investment costs paid by livestock farms, ongoing costs must also be covered so that farmers can plan with certainty. As crucial changes in the Animal Welfare Livestock Husbandry Ordinance have not yet been passed in the Bundesrat, there is no uniform interpretation of the law in the federal states, nor are there any harmonised requirements for companies regarding the forms of husbandry. In our view, there will be major challenges in implementing the law in practice.

It is precisely in this respect, i.e. practical implementation, where the newly passed law reaches its limits. As one of the largest food retailers in Germany, we are committed to avoiding food waste, for economic reasons alone. It is therefore good professional practice to “downgrade” high-quality certified products in order to ensure that they can be marketed despite overproduction or other market changes. It is of great importance to us that the regulations on “downgrading” between animal husbandry stages should be simplified further in order to ensure a workable approach during the processing stage.

The fact that the regulations have so far only applied to fresh and frozen pork from Germany makes it impossible for consumers to obtain complete information about the conditions in which the animal has been reared and kept. For example, marinated meat products for barbecuing are exempt from the animal husbandry label, which points to another weakness in the law.

Finally, we share the concern of animal owners that over the long term, preference will be given to foreign products that do not have to be labelled under the law. In 2021, we agreed to abide by the “5D” standard for pork to show our support for domestic agricultural production. For retailers, Germany stands for quality and high standards when it comes to how animals are reared. It is therefore all the more important to protect this reputation by combining the animal husbandry label with a label of origin. Over the long term, this will require uniform, EU-wide regulations. For this to happen, the German position must first be clear.

Our view on the appropriate way forward

- The federal government should follow through on its announcement that it will quickly present a coherent, comprehensive approach for a mandatory state animal husbandry label. This includes an expansion to other areas – other animal species, the entire animal life cycle, and other sales channels in addition to the food retail trade – as well as a comprehensive financing plan to fund the transformation of animal husbandry.

Your Public Affairs contact on this topic



Niclas Biener

Head of EU Affairs & Agricultural Policy

+49 221 149-1091

About REWE Group

The cooperatively organized REWE Group is one of the leading trade and tourism groups in Germany and Europe. In 2022, the company generated a total external turnover of 85 billion euros. Founded in 1927, REWE Group operates with around 380,000 employees in 21 European countries.

The sales lines include REWE, REWE CENTER and BILLA as well as BILLA PLUS and ADEG supermarkets and consumer stores, the discounter PENNY, IKI, the drugstores BIPA and the toom Baumarkt DIY stores. The company also operates convenience stores REWE To Go and the e-commerce activities REWE Lieferservice and Zooroyal. The Lekkerland Group comprises the wholesale activities of the business group in the area of on-the-go consumption. Travel and tourism under the umbrella of DER Touristik Group includes the tour operators DERTOUR, ITS, Meiers Weltreisen, Kuoni, Helvetic Tours, ITS Coop Travel, Billa Reisen, Koning Aap, Exim Tours and Fischer as well as more than 2,300 travel agencies (e.g. DERTOUR, DERPART, Kuoni, Exim, Fischer and cooperation partners), the hotel brands Sentido, Aldiana, Calimera, Coeee, and the online travel portal Prijsvrij Vakanties.