



EU Reference Centres for Animal Welfare

meeting National Reference Centres and Support Bodies
on 15 October 2025 from 10-13 hrs CET online via Zoom

Short Notes

On 15 October 2025, the four EURCAWs organised an online meeting for the National Reference Centres (NRCs) for Animal Welfare and the National Supporting Bodies (SBs) of Competent Authorities. A total of 41 people attended the meeting. Excluding EURCAW and DG SANTE members, 23 participants represented 14 EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Sweden and Slovenia).

The meeting aimed to facilitate mutual updates between the NRCs/SBs and the four EURCAWs, as well as to promote collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Agenda

Time	Topic	Speaker
10:00-10:05	Welcome and expectations of the meeting	Silvia D'Albenzio
10:05-10:10	Welcome address DG SANTE	Ester Alaez Pons
10:10-10:40	Updates on Centres' activities	4 EURCAWs (<i>Pigs</i> : Hans Spoolder; <i>Poultry-SFA</i> : Emilie Nehlig, <i>Ruminants & Equines</i> : Josef Schenkenfelder, Silvia D'Albenzio; <i>Aqua</i> : Francesc Padros)
10:40-11:40	Introduction of NRCs/SBs	
	- Italian NRL on fish pathology and its involvement in fish welfare	Amedeo Manfrin
	- The goals and methods of the Finnish Animal Welfare Centre's work and current animal welfare issues in Finland: surgical castration of pigs and the future of fur animal production	Satu Raussi
	- RefWel: the Reference Centre for Farm Animal Welfare in Flanders	Charlotte Vanden Hole
	- What's new at the French Reference Centre for Animal Welfare?	Geneviève Aubin-Houzelstein
11:40-11:55	Coffee break	



Time	Topic	Speaker
11:55-12:25	Identification of synergies and overlaps between NRCs/SBs and EURCAWs	Silvia D'Albenzio
12:25-12:55	Centre-specific workshops	
	- Pigs: Keeping pigs with intact tails	Jan Tind Sørensen
	- Poultry-SFA: End of cages	Aida Xercavins Simó, Clara Tolini
	- Ruminants & Equines: Beef cattle welfare	Christoph Winckler, Lena Tuominen
	- Aqua: Welfare indicators for fish at transport	Leonidas Papaharisis
12:55-13:00	Wrap-up and closing	Silvia D'Albenzio

Silvia D'Albenzio from EURCAW *Ruminants & Equines* and Ester Alaez Pons from DG SANTE opened the meeting and welcomed participants. Both emphasised that the meeting is an occasion for mutual learning and identifying pillars for future effective collaboration between the EURCAWs, NRCs and SBs.

Updates on Centres' activities

The meeting began with updates on the activities of the Centres. Each Centre presented highlights of their recent work:

- **EURCAW Pigs** – Novel digital support tool, end of routine tail docking
- **EURCAW Poultry-SFA** – Q2E, dissemination, Study on consciousness assessment in ducks' slaughterhouses
- **EURCAW Ruminants & Equines** – Review on restricted access to pasture and inadequate grazing in ruminants and equines, tabletop simulation exercise on animal welfare during long distance transportation
- **EURCAW Aqua** – Information on its remit and way of working.

The presentation slides are available here: https://www.eurcaw-ruminants-equines.eu/?post_type=knowledge_base&p=3910&preview=true



Introduction of NRCs/SBs

Italian NRL on fish pathology and its involvement in fish welfare

Amedeo Manfrin elaborated on the mission and research activities of Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie (IZSve).

Question from audience if IZS has been nominated independently as a legal entity for animal welfare.

Amedeo Manfrin: In the region, there are 10 Institutes with the role of Competent Authority. IZSLER, located in Brescia, is the official entity for animal welfare since 2003 and has an agreement with the National Reference Laboratory for expertise in aquatic animals.

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The goals and methods of the Finnish Animal Welfare Centre's work and current animal welfare issues in Finland: surgical castration of pigs and the future of fur animal production

Satu Raussi presented an update of the Finnish Centre for Animal Welfare with a focus on surgical castration of pigs and fur animal production. She explained that even though the Centre is not mentioned in the legislation, they have worked with animal welfare issues for fifteen years. The Centre works in close collaboration with authorities, promotes animal welfare by disseminating knowledge, creates policy briefs for politicians and develops different materials like consumer guides. The Centre deals with all species.

Question from Satu Raussi if there was experience on how to raise intact male pigs with undocked tails.

Response from audience that this is rarely investigated and suggestion to contact Herman Vermeer at Wageningen.

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RefWel: the Reference Centre for Farm Animal Welfare in Flanders

Charlotte Vanden Hole introduced the Flanders Scientific **Reference** Center for Farm Animal **Welfare** 'RefWel', which was founded on 1 January 2025. She explained that due to governmental structures of Belgium the Reference Centre is located in Flanders and it is the only Centre for animal welfare in the country. The Centre will arrange training courses in e.g., fitness for transport and footpad lesions in broilers and turkeys.

EURCAW *Pigs* will have a roadshow in Belgium in December 2025 and wishes to talk about the program with RefWel for alignment.

EURCAW *Poultry-SFA* wishes to check the slides on footpad lesions for alignment.

The presentation slides are available here: https://www.eurcaw-ruminants-equines.eu/?post_type=knowledge_base&p=3910&preview=true

What's new at the French Reference Centre for Animal Welfare?

Geneviève Aubin-Houzelstein, the new director of the French Reference Centre for Animal Welfare (FRCAW), presented an update on topics protection of animals during transport and broiler chickens and laying hens.

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Identification of synergies and overlaps between NRCs/SBs and EURCAWs

Silvia D'Albenzio led a session dedicated to identifying potential synergies and overlaps between NRCs/SBs and EURCAWs. To facilitate this, a short survey was shared with participants prior to the meeting. The following questions were then further discussed and ranked during this session using Slido Polls.

- Which potential do you see for closer cooperation between NRCs/SBs as well as between NRCs/SBs and the EURCAWs?
- What are your thoughts on how to promote or strengthen synergies between the NRCs/SBs at EU level and between them and the EURCAWs?
- Which good practices of bilateral/multilateral collaboration between NRCs/SBs are already in place that could be scaled up at EU level?
- Could you please identify any potential overlaps between the NRCs/SBs and the EURCAWs, and suggest solutions for mitigating or avoiding these risks?

It was mentioned that all 4 EURCAWs use LinkedIn, which is a good way of staying informed of the different activities. Further, the significance of personal contacts was underlined, and it was mentioned that through meetings new contacts are created and some potential overlaps in activities were identified. The importance of sharing comparable data was emphasised.

The presentation slides as well as the poll results are available here: https://www.eurcaw-ruminants-equines.eu/?post_type=knowledge_base&p=3910&preview=true





Centre-specific workshops

EURCAW Pigs – Keeping pigs with intact tails

Expected outcome: We are looking for promising strategies to get rid of routine tail docking! Are there measures by policy and/or industry in your country to support farmers keeping pigs with intact tails? What do pig farmers who successfully keep pigs with intact tails change?

Based on informal reports from several Member States, the majority of pigs (>90%) are still tail-docked despite the EU-wide ban. The situation varies across countries, with ongoing efforts and challenges related to tail biting.

In **Flanders**, Belgium, there is an ongoing research project investigating possible approaches to stop routine tail docking and to manage pigs with intact tails (Link to project: Possible (research) approach for less/stopping routine tail docking and keeping pigs with long(er) tails - ILVO Flanders). In **Portugal**, most pigs remain tail docked. Farmers face challenges with osteomyelitis resulting from tail biting, highlighting the need for practical information on what needs to be done at the abattoir level. According to the **Swedish** representative, there are very few cases of tail biting in Sweden due to the regular use of straw as enrichment material. It was also suggested that providing pigs with straw can effectively prevent tail biting. In **Ireland**, tail biting remains an economic and welfare concern, as 50% of pigs produced are exported. Tail docking is still routinely practiced. Proposed possible solutions include increasing space allowance, retrofitting existing pens, and providing straw material. However, the limited availability of good-quality straw in Ireland makes it difficult to find a cost-effective solution. In **France**, there are growing efforts from farmers to reduce or stop the practice. Training programmes have been introduced to help farmers evaluate tail lesions, with the aim of phasing out tail docking without requiring a large budget. However, many farmers believe that the Swedish system is not directly comparable to their own production systems. In **Estonia**, more than 90% of pigs are also tail docked. While the use of straw is considered a plausible preventive measure, it poses potential biosecurity complications related to African Swine Fever. Farmers in Estonia receive subsidies and are required to provide at least 15% more space than the EU minimum requirement. They must also offer enrichment materials, at least one of which must be natural. However, these requirements are





not linked to stop docking. The Estonia University of Life Science is taking part in an ongoing EU project assessing animal welfare which includes the assessment of farms in Estonia.

To summarise across the ten MS represented in the session there seems to be little or no progress in the proportion of managing pigs with intact tails. Except for Sweden all the represented countries continue to tail dock.

There were no slides presented during the workshop.

EURCAW Poultry-SFA – End of cages

Expected outcome: The workshop will focus on the end of cages for e.g., laying hens, ducks, breeders, rabbits as well as the ban on beak trimming. Is there any ongoing national legislation about stopping these practices? What alternative systems and management methods have been implemented to prevent negative consequences for animal welfare arising from these changes? Have NRCs and SBs been questioned by their Competent Authority or other stakeholders on these topics?

The current situation regarding End of cages (poultry and rabbits) and Beak trimming (poultry) was discussed, with feedback from 3 EU Member States. EURCAW Poultry-SFA presented the work that has been done in relation to these topics, including queries asked to the Centre. One NRC shared that they were asked to provide support on how to manage laying hens with intact beaks, and were also financed to perform studies about enriched cages in the past, but not recently. Another NRC shared that they were financed to perform a study about part-time group housing of does. Participants showed interest about future exchange of recommendations about these topics, especially about pullets and dual-purpose poultry breeds.

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EURCAW Ruminants & Equines – Beef cattle welfare

Expected outcome: Currently, there are no specific welfare regulations for beef cattle outside the general Farm Animals Directive 98/58/EC. In light of the recently adopted EFSA Scientific Opinion on the welfare of beef cattle, we would like to discuss how, or indeed if, this topic is addressed in your country.

In Austria the topic is getting more attention, especially regarding space allowance. Fully slatted floors are not allowed for dairy cattle, but the court turned down the case regarding giving the same conditions to beef cattle.

In Finland the topic does not get as much attention as dairy cows. Bull calves are raised for meat. It is not mandatory to give beef cattle outdoor access. At the same time, beef cattle are often kept grazing for long periods of the year. The state offers compensation for adding rubber mats to the resting areas. The new animal welfare act states that beef cattle cannot be tethered from 2028, even if it is an uncommon method. There is no space for male calves on dairy farms, so young calves are sent for rearing to other farms, which is not good for animal welfare. On beef cattle farms the calves can stay with the dam.

A question was asked about painful procedures and mutilations. They can only be performed by a veterinarian using both anaesthesia and analgesia in Finland.

It was mentioned that beef cattle welfare has been underestimated in EU for many years. There is a lot that can be done by the farmers at low cost e.g., improvements of microclimate and humidity level, whereas the space allowance recommendation from EFSA might not be feasible. Concern was raised about the increase in beef consumption in Greece, suggesting the consumer pays more attention to the price than to the animals' welfare.

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EURCAW Aqua – Welfare indicators for fish at transport

Expected outcome: A very interesting and challenging topic such as the live fish transportation is selected for presentation. The participants will have the opportunity to better understand the process, to recognize the key risk factors, to link them with specific welfare risks and finally to assign Welfare Indicators for managing this challenging process.

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