



## **To tighten controls on animal welfare?**

The Agriculture Committee of the European parliament (AGRI) studied on March 18 the issue of animal welfare. The concern was to assess the EU's 2006-2010 animal welfare action plan. It appears from the debates that a stricter enforcement of rules in this area is needed.

The “Animal welfare” concept is based on a range of rules like general principles but also numerous technical standards. Each farmer must follow these rules on an ethical point of view. But also for institutional reasons. Indeed, the rules established by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as the conditionality of aid or opportunities for assistance under the rural development policy are based on requirements concerning livestock’s animal welfare. Finally, compliance with certain rules is required to be certified as "organic" in particular since the establishment of new European logo from 1 July 2010 and its significant specifications.

The parliament points a lack of rigor in the application of these rules. It could be facilitated by the introduction of stricter controls and tougher fines in the case of violations of the regulations. But is it a warning or an real determination of the MEPs? We can recall that the cost of compliance for farmers - restructuring enclosures, increasing the land area per head, applying new techniques of castration ... – always reflects the difficulty for some farmers to get down to it.

The Agriculture Committee also indicated its priorities: monitoring the ban on battery cages for laying hens, rules on pigs, on the transport of animals, on raising geese and ducks for example. It suggests ways of action: increasing the resources dedicated to EC controls, setting up a European network for animal welfare and developing a new action plan from 2011 to 2015. Nevertheless, it remains a blur on the deadlines for implementation of these official controls and on the types of fines envisaged. However, the EU's objectives are clear: To ensure compliance with specifications and to certify the adequacy of labels. For the happiness of our animals of course!

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Lise Rihouey

**Lise Rihouey,**

**PhD student, affiliated to DCS and the Program Lascaux**

