



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 10/25/2005

GAIN Report Number: SW5014

Sweden

Livestock and Products

Animal Welfare Legislation in Sweden

2005

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Report Highlights:

Animal welfare is a priority issue for the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Affairs. Within the EU, Sweden considers itself to be at the forefront on animal welfare with stricter regulations than EU standards in several respects. This report provides an overview of Sweden's animal welfare legislation where it differs from that of the EU.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Stockholm [SW1]
[SW]

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SUMMARY

Animal welfare is a priority issue for the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Affairs. Within the EU, Sweden considers itself to be at the forefront on animal welfare and has been one of the driving forces behind the development of more stringent EU legislation on such issues as animal transport, antibiotics and requirements for enhanced cages for laying hens.

The EU's regulatory framework for animal husbandry offers general, basic protection to all farm animals within the EU. Member States are, however, free to adopt more rigorous national legislation. The Government of Sweden has seized that opportunity, having established animal welfare regulations that are, in several respects, stricter than the EU standard.

In striving towards improved conditions for farm animals, the Swedish government has been strongly supported by its farmers. Animal welfare has been one of the Federation of Swedish Farmers' key issues for more than 20 years. This organization has well-developed policies and guidelines aimed at instituting the best animal welfare standards in the world.

High animal welfare standards are a part of the "Swedish model" of food production. The Swedish model is a concept used by Swedish farmers in marketing their products. It stands for good quality food produced in a sustainable and ethical way. While the Swedish model is, for the most part, a product of the Federation of Swedish Farmers, some farmers do acknowledge its negative effect on competitiveness in terms of higher production costs vis-à-vis farmers in other EU countries.

This report gives an overview of Swedish animal welfare legislation where it differs from EU legislation. The basic provisions regarding how animals should be kept and cared for in Sweden are found in the Swedish Animal Welfare Act (1988:534) and the Swedish Animal Welfare Ordinance (1988:539). Swedish Board of Agriculture regulations SJVFS 2003:6 and SJVFS 2003:3 contain more detailed rules and general advice on animal husbandry. Rules for animal transport are found in SJVFS 2003:133.

Council Directive 98/58/EC established the framework legislation on animal welfare for farm animals in the EU. In addition, the EU has adopted specific regulations for laying hens (Council Directive 1999/74/EC), calves (Council Directive 91/629/EC), and pigs (Council Directive 2001/88/EC and 2001/93/EC). Rules for animal transport are contained in Council Directive 91/628/EC.

GENERAL ANIMAL WELFARE REGULATIONS

Swedish Antibiotic Ban

The use of antibiotics in animal feed to promote growth has been prohibited in Sweden since 1986. The ban is based on human and animal health reasons, specifically the risk of developing antibiotic resistance. Antibiotics are allowed and commonly used within the EU. However, Sweden was permitted to maintain its ban when it joined the EU in 1995. Within the EU, Sweden has been pushing for an EU-wide ban on the use of antibiotics. Partly as a result of these efforts, the EU will impose a ban on the use of antibiotics in feed to promote growth as of January 1, 2006.

Buildings for Farm Animals

Unlike EU regulations, Swedish law provides detailed requirements for climate and air quality in buildings for farm animals. Sweden maintains maximum levels for humidity, carbon dioxide, ammonium, hydrogen sulfide and dust. In addition, detailed specifications have been established regarding manure disposal systems in order to prevent high gas levels.

Animal Transport

The EU transport directive (Council directive 91/628/EEG, amended by 95/29/EG) is the basis for Sweden's transport legislation. This directive is a "precise" directive, which means that Member States, with certain exceptions, are not permitted to have lower or higher requirements in their national transport rules. A proposal for new stricter regulations on animal transport is currently being discussed within the EU. For more information, please refer to the USEU GAIN Report - Animal Welfare Legislation in the EU, E34089.

Slaughtering of Farm Animals

Under Directive 93/119/EEC, Member States retain the right to authorize religious slaughter without pre-stunning within their own territory. According to Swedish regulations, the slaughter of un-stunned animals is prohibited in all circumstances except in extreme emergencies. All animals must be stunned when the blood is drawn. Other measures may not be taken during slaughtering until the animal is dead.

SPECIFIC REGULATIONS FOR CATTLE

Swedish animal welfare legislation for cattle is similar to EU legislation, with a few exceptions. Swedish legislation requires pasture husbandry during summer time for cattle over 6 months. Swedish regulations also set a maximum number of beef cattle in stable compartments.

SPECIFIC REGULATIONS FOR PIGS

According to Swedish legislation, the weaning period for piglets must be at least 4 weeks. EU regulations also require 4 weeks, unless the piglets are moved into specialized housing that has been emptied and thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before the introduction of a new group. Piglet housing must be separate from housing for sows. Under these conditions, the EU weaning period can be 3 weeks.

Requirements on freedom of movement are stricter under Swedish legislation than EU. Sows must be kept loose during the entire mating cycle. If necessary, individual sows or gilts may be confined for a maximum of one week around farrowing. From 2006, the EU will not allow the tethering of sows. As of 2013, the EU will not allow the confinement of sows except for the period one week prior to and four weeks after farrowing.

In addition, Sweden is the only country in the EU that regulates the maximum number of hogs per housing unit - 200 for continuous breeding and 400 for animals raised in cycles.

SPECIFIC REGULATIONS FOR LAYING HENS

Since 1999, Sweden has banned the use of non-enriched cages. All cages must be equipped (enriched) with a nest, a roost and litter. Hens must have at least 750 cm² of cage area per animal. During an interim period, exemptions to use non-enriched cages were granted. These exemptions expired in 2004.

EU legislation currently allows the use of non-enriched cages with at least 550 cm² of cage area per hen. This type of rearing system will, however, be prohibited effective January 1, 2012 when EU requirements will be the same as in Sweden. Since January 1, 2003, non-enriched cages cannot be built or brought into service for the first time.

Higher costs related to the stricter husbandry system requirements for Swedish egg producers, as well as the extra costs related to the adoption of this new system (enriched cages) have negatively affected the competitiveness of Swedish egg producers. Some of the largest egg producers in Sweden, accounting for 25% of Swedish egg production, are reportedly planning to sue the Swedish government, requesting compensation for investments related to the conversion to enriched cages.

The EU Commission has questioned whether the Swedish ban on non-enriched cages is consistent with EU legislation.

SPECIFIC REGULATIONS FOR FUR ANIMALS (MINKS)

The Government of Sweden is currently working on a proposal for stricter requirements for mink farming.

Current mink farming practices in Sweden are far from meeting the draft proposed requirements. Swedish authorities have actually stated that the goal of the new regulations is to eventually phase out fur production in Sweden. The new law will require that minks be kept in a stimulating environment allowing for natural behavior including swimming. These new regulations will become effective January 1, 2007 with a transitional period ending on December 31, 2008. The Swedish government plans to provide financial compensation to those mink farmers who will cease production due to the new requirements. Mink farmers will also be offered assistance to convert to other types of farming.