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Animal Welfare Legislation in Sweden

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Approved by:

Roger Wentzel, Agricultural Counselor
U.S. Embassy, Sweden

Prepared by:

Åsa Lexmon, Agricultural Specialist

Report Highlights:

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

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SUMMARY

Animal welfare is a priority issue for the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. 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 and has 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 Swedish 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, focusing on 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 Animal Welfare Agency regulation DFS 2004:17 contains more detailed rules and general advice on animal husbandry. Rules for animal transport are found in DFS 2004:10.

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 1/2005/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 were allowed and commonly used within the EU when Sweden joined the EU in 1995. Sweden was, however, permitted to maintain its ban. 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 imposed 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

On January 5, 2007, the new EU regulation on animal welfare in transport (1/2005/EC) entered into force. This new EU regulation, which will be fully implemented in Swedish national legislation, introduces higher standards for vehicles and equipment and stricter requirements for people dealing with animals in transport. New measures on traveling times and stocking densities are not included in the new regulation but the Commission plans to propose new measures for these two issues before the end of 2009.

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. Hence, Swedish regulations do not allow traditional slaughtering methods such as halal and kosher. Pre-stunning by electric shock has, however, become more accepted within the Muslim community in Sweden. Nevertheless, this modified halal method is not commonly practiced in Sweden and there is demand for imported halal- and kosher meat. Electric shock may only be used on poultry and sheep in Sweden.

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 of age. Swedish regulations also set a maximum number of beef cattle in an enclosed building unit.

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 breeding and gestation cycle. If necessary, individual sows or gilts may be confined for a maximum of one week around farrowing. From 2006, the EU does not allow the tethering of sows. As of 2013, the EU will not allow the confinement of sows except for the period of 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.

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.

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.

SPECIFIC REGULATIONS FOR BROILERS

Currently, there are no EU animal welfare standards for broilers. The European Commission has, however, proposed legislation that sets out a maximum stocking density of 30 kg/m² for live birds. For producers who also meet the requirements on ventilation and water access laid down in this proposal, stocking densities of up to 38 kg/m² are allowed. Sweden has national legislation on animal welfare standards for broilers. With regard to stocking density, the corresponding figures in Swedish legislation are 20 kg/ m² and 36 kg/m², respectively.

SPECIFIC REGULATIONS FOR FUR ANIMALS (MINKS)

In the spring of 2006, the Swedish government proposed stricter requirements for mink farming. The goal of the new requirements was to eventually phase out fur production in Sweden. The new Swedish government created after the election in September 2006 has, however, decided not to go forward with this proposal.