

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Voluntary    Public

**Date:** 3/22/2013

**GAIN Report Number:** PL1312

## Poland

**Post:** Warsaw

### **The Ritual Slaughter Debate - More than Meats the Eye!**

**Report Categories:**

Agricultural Situation

**Approved By:**

Michael Henney, Agricultural Attaché

**Prepared By:**

Piotr Rucinski, Agricultural Specialist

**Report Highlights:**

The continuing ideological debate pitting religion versus animal rights broadened this past week as producer and commercial stakeholders publically entered the fray through a peaceful demonstration and deliverance of petitions demanding their economic rights be taken into consideration by government leaders as well.

**General Information:**

On March 20, 2013 almost 2,000 representatives of the Polish meat industry protested in front of the Polish Parliament demanding legalization of ritual slaughter of animals without stunning. Since January 1, 2013, the slaughter of animals without stunning has been banned in Poland as a result of the court decision following a legal challenge to the standing Polish regulation (See Gain PL1302). The Polish Meat Association and the National Committee of Manifestation organized the protest in effort to elevate the public's eye the larger economic cost to society as measured by several thousand jobs lost due to the country's indifference towards personal religious rights. Protesters indicated the economic damage and possible collapse of many businesses related to meat processing and meat exports resulting from the legislation prohibiting slaughter of animals without stunning. The organizers of the protest presented petitions directed to Ewa Kopacz, the Speaker of the Lower Parliament (Sejm), and to Donald Tusk, the Prime Minister, that demands modification to existing national legislation.

According to industry calculations presented by protestors, in 2012 animals slaughtered in accordance to ritual Islamic and Judean principles produced product amounting to 10 percent of poultry and over thirty percent of beef exported. In 2012, total Polish exports of poultry meat reached Euro 1.2 billion, and beef – Euro 1.35 billion.

The Government of Poland released an announcement that due the Minister of Agriculture being in Brussels attending the EU Council of Ministers meeting, further government discussion on the proposal to amend the Law on Protection of Animals would be delayed. This law provides the basis by which animal rights activists challenged religious based ritual slaughter practices.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) had sought to amend the segment of the Polish Law on Protection of Animals that the courts had ruled prohibited the slaughter of animals without prior stunning by inserting reference to EU Regulation 1099/2009 which defines the legally acceptable treatment of animals during slaughter. While MARD's activity was internal press reports purport that the proposal submitted to the Council of Ministers (Poland's Cabinet) for consider included the opinion of the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) which notes that even with prior stunning an animal suffered from slaughter and that certain Islamic sects (not all) allowed for stunning of animals prior to ritual slaughter.

The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) weighed in on this issue showing support for the position of the MARD with its legal opinion that the (MARD) proposal was in line with the EU law. The MFA also highlighted that in Austria, France, and Germany ritual slaughter was allowed through special permits issued to religious communities while in Spain and Italy slaughter plants only were required to notify authorities that they conduct ritual slaughter activity on premise.

The animal welfare organization - Foundation Ius Animalia, accused the MARD of incorrect interpretation of EU law. In its opinion slaughter with stunning is a rule in the EU while ritual slaughter is an exception that requires introduction of detailed national regulations. It also refers to the European Tribunal of Human Rights which in 2000 stated that if ritual slaughter is carried out it must be regulated by the national public authority (Re: Cha'are Shalom Ve Tsedek vs France).

Wednesday's demonstration served to further broaden the political stakes challenging the current Polish government as it moved the public discussion beyond the religious versus animal rights debate to also enjoin now labor and commercial viability considerations in a country sliding into economic contraction and rising unemployment.