Zootechnical legislation

The European Commission has proposed to consolidate the existing EU zootechnical legislation which covers breeding, trade in and import of breeding animals, into a single regulation. In April, the European Parliament is due to debate and vote on the compromise text agreed in trilogue.

Context

A well-functioning animal-breeding sector is essential for EU animal production, and is estimated to generate added value of €1.89 billion. EU zootechnical legislation aims to promote free trade in breeding animals and their genetic material. This legislation is currently organised according to species (bovine, porcine, equine, ovine and caprine), for each of which there is a basic directive as well as specific decisions and directives covering recognition of breeding organisations, entry of breeding animals in breeding books, pedigree certificates, performance testing and genetic evaluation, and acceptance for breeding.

Commission proposal

On 11 February 2014, the Commission presented a proposal for a regulation on the zootechnical and genealogical conditions for trade in and imports into the EU of breeding animals and their germinal products. Under the proposal, the current principles and rules in the field of animal breeding would be maintained, as they are considered sufficient and appropriate. However, the separate and almost identical provisions should be brought together and streamlined, by consolidating the existing legislation into a single regulation.

Using the form of a regulation is intended to help avoid obstacles to trade resulting from differences in national transposition. Greater clarity would be ensured through more precise wording, consistent terminology and additional definitions. The new regulation would include rules on official controls, specifically adapted for the animal breeding sector, which is not covered by the pending new regulation on official controls. The proposed regulation would apply to important livestock species (cattle, pigs, horses, sheep and goats), while breeding of other species could be regulated by delegated acts.

Legislative work

In October 2015, Parliament’s Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) adopted a report on the proposed regulation (rapporteur: Michel Dantin, EPP, France) and decided to open inter-institutional negotiations. According to the rapporteur, the co-legislators followed the same political lines during the trilogues, and most of Parliament’s amendments were taken into account. Among the main concerns were the need to preserve endangered breeds and to reflect the specific characteristics of species, in particular horses and hybrid pigs. Special provisions for endangered breeds and for the horse-breeding sector were included in the agreed text. Member States were given the possibility to refuse the approval of a further animal-breeding programme. The provisions on official controls were modified to minimise the burden for breeders. More definitions were introduced, including that for ‘breed’, which the Commission had wanted to keep undefined. The possibility to regulate other species by delegated acts was removed. The ‘Animal Breeding Regulation’ (its short title) would apply to breeding, trade in and entry into the EU of breeding animals of the bovine, porcine, ovine, caprine and equine species and their germinal products.

Trilogue agreement

Parliament and Council reached a first-reading agreement in December 2015. The compromise text was endorsed by the AGRI Committee in January 2016. The debate and vote is scheduled for the first April plenary. If Parliament adopts the text at first reading, Council should approve this position without amendment in its own first reading and the regulation would thus be adopted. It would be implemented 28 months after its entry into force, later in 2016.