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## TEXTS ADOPTED

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### **P9\_TA(2021)0295**

### **European Citizens' Initiative "End the cage age"**

### **European Parliament resolution of 10 June 2021 on the European Citizens' Initiative 'End the cage age' (2021/2633(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) 'End the cage age' (ECI(2018)000004), which received 1,4 million validated signatures from across every Member State of the then EU-28 and is the first valid ECI on farmed animals,
- having regard to the public hearing on the European Citizens' Initiative 'End the cage age' of 15 April 2021,
- having regard to the Special Eurobarometer 442 entitled 'Attitudes of Europeans towards Animal Welfare', which concluded that 82 % of EU citizens believe that the welfare of farmed animals should be better protected than it is now,
- having regard to Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to Council Directive 1999/74/EC of 19 July 1999 laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to Council Directive 2008/119/EC of 18 December 2008 laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to Council Directive 2008/120/EC of 18 December 2008 laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on the Common Agricultural Policy adopted on 5 December 2018 (CDR 3637/2018),

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 221, 8.8.1998, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 203, 3.8.1999, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> OJ L 10, 15.1.2009, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 47, 18.2.2009, p. 5.

- having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on Agro-ecology adopted on 5 February 2021 (CDR 3137/2020),
  - having regard to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) Scientific Opinion of 21 November 2019 entitled ‘Health and welfare of rabbits farmed in different production systems’,
  - having regard to its resolution of 14 March 2017 on minimum standards for the protection of farm rabbits<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 25 October 2018 on animal welfare, antimicrobial use and the environmental impact of industrial broiler farming<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to the Commission Staff Working Document of 31 March 2021 entitled ‘Evaluation of the European Union Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2012-2015’ (SWD(2021)0077),
  - having regard to the European Court of Auditors Special Report No 31/2018 on animal welfare in the EU,
  - having regard to the European Parliamentary Research Service study of November 2020 entitled ‘End the Cage Age: Looking for Alternatives’,
  - having regard to Rule 222(8) of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the motion for a resolution of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development,
- A. whereas the TFEU establishes citizenship of the Union and further enhances the democratic functioning of the Union by providing, inter alia, that every citizen has the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union through an ECI;
  - B. whereas the importance of the ECI in shaping EU policy initiatives and developments should be acknowledged, as should the lack of action to follow up previous successful ECIs;
  - C. whereas Article 13 TFEU clearly recognises animals as sentient beings; whereas it further states that the Union and its Member States must pay full regard to the requirements of animal welfare when formulating and implementing the Union’s agriculture policies;
  - D. whereas the high animal welfare standards already in place in the EU, which are among the highest in the world, should be acknowledged;
  - E. whereas the Farm to Fork Strategy recognises the urgent need to improve animal welfare and to broaden its scope, highlighting the benefits it brings for animals, food quality, reducing the need for medication and preserving biodiversity, and following the latest scientific advice;

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 263, 25.7.2018, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 345, 16.10.2020, p. 28.

- F. whereas a study by the European Parliament's Research Service commissioned by the Committee on Petitions entitled 'End the Cage Age: Looking for Alternatives' found that cage-free housing systems can be achieved in Europe, recommending financial and policy measures in the short term and legislation in the long term; whereas this study confirms that 'the EU can make sure that animal products that do not comply with EU standards cannot be imported into the EU';
- G. whereas the proposed ECI refers to 'hundreds of millions of EU farm animals [...] kept in cages for most of their lives';
- H. whereas rabbits are the animals most commonly housed in cages, with approximately 85 % in barren cages and 9 % in enriched cages, while approximately 50 % of laying hens in the EU were housed in enriched cages in 2019, with the percentages being considerably higher in most eastern, central and southern EU Member States; whereas in the pig sector, the large majority of sows are caged during certain stages of their reproductive cycle;
- I. whereas the proposed ECI aims to improve animal welfare;
- J. whereas the keeping of animals in cages as a livestock production system was born out of the confluence of several factors, namely: the need to identify the best animals for genetic selection, the improvement of hygiene conditions, and better management that allowed automation, and thus the more efficient use of increasingly scarce labour to compensate for the increase in the price of land or the cost of facilities;
- K. whereas the complexity of animal health and welfare should be recognised; whereas the characteristics of different animals should be taken into account in designing housing systems to suit their needs;
- L. whereas over 300 million farmed animals each year are caged for part or all of their lives, and there are grave concerns throughout the EU about the welfare of animals reared and farmed in cages, as animals are not even able to stand straight, to stretch or to turn around, and it is impossible for animals kept in cages to exhibit their natural behaviour;
- M. whereas farmers have made high investments to improve animal welfare, and have not yet fully recovered their investment; whereas these systems have been jointly developed by farmers, veterinarians, scientists and non-governmental organisations in order to ensure that the welfare requirements of each species are covered;
- N. whereas the market-driven efforts that farmers are making should be acknowledged, as should the need to obtain a return from the market in order to continue investing in sustainability;
- O. whereas the risk of relocating animal production and thus displacing core animal health and welfare issues to third countries should be recognised;
- P. whereas the shift in housing systems to full cage-free housing systems will require additional investments and lead to an increase in production costs, especially at the beginning of this transition due to investment costs that farmers will have to bear; whereas sanitary issues in farm breeding must be always kept in mind;

- Q. whereas the 2014-2020 cumulative expenditure for the common agricultural policy (CAP) as declared by the Member States at the end 2019 on animal welfare measure represented only 1,15 % of the CAP allocation<sup>1</sup>;
- R. whereas any change in housing systems should achieve a balance between several aspects of sustainability, i.e. animal welfare, animal health, environmental protection and farmers' competitiveness;
- S. whereas full cage-free housing systems need to provide adequate microclimate conditions and to be suitable for each geographical region in the EU and for all climate conditions, including extreme weather conditions;
- T. whereas a few Member States have already advanced beyond the minimum EU standards and prohibited the use of enriched cages for egg-laying hens, both barren and enriched cages for rabbits, or sow stalls and farrowing crates, with phase-out legislation in other Member States due to come into force in 2030 at the latest;
- U. whereas before introducing any changes in housing systems, the costs of the required transformation both in the short and long term have to be assessed; whereas an impact assessment must take into account the needs of sectors according to animal species, including economic and sanitary issues;
- V. whereas the shift in housing systems will increase the risk of animals spreading transmissible diseases and developing social stress due to dominance and competition, which affects their health and could increase the need for medication;
- W. whereas to facilitate such a substantial shift, appropriate financial investment support and compensation to offset farmers' higher productions costs and farmers' income losses has to be ensured;
- X. whereas animal welfare has been included as a specific objective in the common agricultural policy, and Member States can therefore make this funding available for the transition away from cages, for example through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development;
- Y. whereas it should be recognised that in some cases, some forms of cage for housing brings more animal-welfare related benefits than negative effects for the animal concerned; whereas in any case cages must be proportionate to the size of the animal housed and the purpose to be achieved;
- Z. whereas the European Court of Auditors Special Report on Animal Welfare in the EU noted that Member States made only a limited use of the common agricultural policy funds to address animal welfare objectives;
- AA. whereas the animal welfare rules and improvements to the size of cages have been programmed in several rural development programmes over the years; whereas the

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<sup>1</sup> 13th Financial Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) - 2019 Financial Year, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0387&from=EN>

objective of the measure was included in a number of programmes by default by means of measures increasing the size of a cage or a crate;

- AB. whereas if any change in the legal obligations on animal housing is planned, the level of implementation of animal welfare rules in the EU Member States has to be taken into consideration, and a species-by-species approach has to be adopted;
- AC. whereas the European Union imports products produced from animals which are reared in conditions which cannot generally be verified;
- AD. whereas there are alternative systems which are commercially viable and already in use, e.g. barn, free range and organic systems for hens, floor pens, and outdoor free-range or organic systems for rabbits, indoor and outdoor free-farrowing and group housing systems for sows, barn and aviary systems for quail, and group housing systems for calves;
1. Asks the Commission to provide information by 2022 about its ongoing Fitness Check of current EU animal welfare legislation;
  2. Calls on the Commission to develop a more comprehensive food policy to support the shift towards a more sustainable food system taking into account its economic, social and environmental dimensions, with appropriate support to farmers to prevent in particular small and medium-sized farms from further withdrawing from livestock production, and to prevent its further concentration;
  3. Acknowledges that alternatives to cage farming are being successfully implemented in a number of Member States; considers that alternative systems should be developed, improved and encouraged;
  4. Calls on the Commission to base new animal welfare initiatives strictly on independent scientific research, also taking into account any possible negative impact, such as the risk of diseases, breastbone fracture or cannibalism in the poultry sector;
  5. Calls on the Commission to ensure proper transposition of the ‘End the cage age’ ECI’s demands in the context of the current revision of Directive 98/58/EC, and in line with the EU Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategies;
  6. Urges the Commission to eliminate bureaucracy and regulatory constraints in order to allow livestock producers to make the necessary structural changes in their facilities to integrate new animal welfare provisions;
  7. Stresses that the market for animal products from cage-free, free range and organic systems, as well as the market for plant-based alternatives, is growing in the EU;
  8. Notes that the EU has pioneered certain bans on cages for farmed animals, in particular a partial ban on veal crates in 2007, a ban on barren battery cages for egg-laying hens in 2012, a partial ban on sow stalls in 2013, and a total ban on cages in all organic farming throughout the EU;
  9. Recalls that some EU Member States have already adopted national legislation to ban certain forms of caged farming which goes beyond minimum EU standards, increasing

the urgency for legislation at the EU level to end the practice of cage farming and to ensure a level playing field for farmers across the EU;

10. Calls on the Commission to propose legislative instruments on fair and sustainable farming, and in particular, to propose a revision of Directive 98/58/EC with the objective of phasing out the use of cages in EU animal farming, assessing a possible phasing-out by 2027;
11. Emphasises the need for this phasing-out to be based on a scientifically based impact assessment and to ensure an appropriate transition period;
12. Calls on the Commission to adopt a species-by-species approach that takes into account and assesses the characteristics of each different animal, which should have housing systems suited to their specific needs;
13. Calls on the Commission to re-evaluate trade agreements with third countries in order to ensure that they meet the same animal welfare and product quality standards;
14. Stresses that rabbits are the second most farmed species in the EU in terms of numbers of animals, with a majority of them reared in cages with inadequate welfare standards; calls on the Commission in this regard to propose specific EU legislation on minimum standards for the protection of farmed rabbits;
15. Calls for shorter supply chains in animal and human nutrition, relying on locally or regionally produced protein crops for animal feed and human consumption; notes that the Farm to Fork Strategy supports sustainable animal production, the establishment of shorter supply chains for food products and a fairer trade policy in which European standards take a more prominent position;
16. Acknowledges the positive steps made by the EU in recent years, with the comprehensive improvement of animal welfare conditions, the introduction of bans on cages for certain farmed animals, and the banning of cages in all organic farming;
17. Welcomes the best practices already implemented by several Member States with the adoption of national legislation going beyond EU minimum standards on animal welfare, namely the banning on certain forms of caged farming; urges all Member States to swiftly adopt measures promoting the replacement of cage farming with non-cage alternative systems;
18. Calls on the Commission to support farmers in their efforts to improve animal welfare, in particular as part of the EU's Green Deal, CAP Strategic Plans and the Farm to Fork Strategy, in order to avoid a loss of competitiveness and a subsequent relocation of EU production to non-EU countries with lower animal welfare ambitions; believes that all EU production systems should be given a chance to invest in sustainability and animal welfare;
19. Calls on the Commission to put forward proposals to ban the cruel and unnecessary force-feeding of ducks and geese for the production of *foie gras*;
20. Calls on the Member States to assist farmers and stockpeople by providing advice and training, if needed, in order to ease the transition to cage-free systems;

21. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that effective controls and customs checks are performed in order to ensure the reciprocity of quality and safety requirements and of the EU animal welfare standards to strengthen the competitiveness of European agriculture in the global market for all agri-food products imported into the EU;
22. Reiterates the importance of enforceable trade and sustainable development chapters in all EU trade agreements as a means of guaranteeing that the EU's higher regulatory ambitions are consistent with EU trade policy, and that they are complied with by non-EU countries that have signed trade agreements with the EU;
23. Underlines that trade and sustainable development chapters should also take account of equivalent production standards, in particular animal welfare;
24. Considers a fair trade policy that ensures a level playing field to be a precondition for higher European standards; urges the Commission, therefore, to step up its efforts on controls on imported food products;
25. Insists that all animal products imported into the EU should be produced in full compliance with relevant EU legislation, including on the use of cage-free farming systems;
26. Urges the Commission to ensure sufficient support and a transition period for the progressive adaptation of farmers and livestock breeders, that takes into account the investment cycle of farmers, as well as funding mechanisms with a view to facilitating the transition, while maintaining the competitiveness and social resilience of the EU agri-food sector;
27. Believes this support and a transition period should be ensured before any legislative changes are proposed to animal and human sanitary guarantees and the protection of workers, in order to prevent land abandonment and further withdrawal from livestock production (especially by small and medium-sized farms without the resources to adapt accordingly);
28. Reiterates that the Commission needs to support farmers in educating consumers and communicating to them current high animal welfare standards; calls on the Commission and the Member States, therefore, to provide for appropriate financial support and guidance to ensure a smooth transition for the European farmers concerned;
29. Stresses that the livestock sector is very dynamic and capable of adapting to changes in both legislation and consumer preferences; underscores, however, that in order to do so, it needs to be rewarded for its efforts with direct aid, so that the sustainability of production and the viability of farms are not jeopardised;
30. Stresses the overall importance of a fair distribution of costs and benefits in the food chain and the role of the market in enabling farmers to become more sustainable; considers in this regard that a voluntary animal welfare label would be suitable to indicating the commitment of the chain from farm to fork to contributing to the aims of the ECI 'End the cage age', while ensuring adequate pricing;
31. Stresses the importance of supporting farmers and helping them to move to more sustainable farming by providing adequate advisory and training services, incentives

and financial programmes to support their standard of living and their competitiveness in rural areas, promoting investment and food chain organisation, strengthening small local processors and supporting a short supply chain;

32. Asks the Commission to promote animal welfare internationally and to conduct initiatives with a view to increasing awareness among non-EU countries, including by measures such as further mutual assistance and accelerated exchange of information between the competent authorities in all Member States and in non-EU countries;
33. Recalls that livestock farms are innovative places, constantly investing in improving their infrastructure and practices to keep up with the latest scientific evidence and consumers' expectations;
34. Calls for the development of an appropriate demand market in which it is possible to market all products produced with higher quality standards at higher prices;
35. Calls on the Commission to present possible conversion programmes for a faster phasing-out of cage farming, including an assessment of the follow-up costs;
36. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, and to the governments and parliaments of the Member States.