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Criteria-Based Evaluation of Selected European Animal Welfare labels: Initiatives from the Poultry Meat Sector

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1. Introduction

In the context of intensive livestock farming the issue animal welfare is increasingly the focus of politics, media and society. Especially the compliance with animal welfare standards in breeding, housing systems, transport and slaughter determines the public debate. In addition, ethical and sustainable aspects of products and production processes have become even more important for consumers in recent years. Animal welfare labels represent an option to establish a market for products which meet higher animal welfare standards. They can serve consumers as quality signals, and, therefore, have the potential to mobilize the required consumers' willingness to pay more.

2. Objectives

The aim of the present study is an evaluation of selected European animal welfare labels for broilers based on a comparative analysis of their respective standards, according to a previously developed set of criteria. Thereby this study will contribute to improve customer orientation as well as to existing approaches.

3. Materials and Methods

- Development of a general set of criteria based on the standards of the EU legislation
- Analysis of publicly available data on the selected European animal welfare labels
- Development of an appropriate evaluation scheme
- Comparative analysis and evaluation of the selected animal welfare labels

Evaluation Scheme

Improvement of the standards of the investigated labels compared to the EU Standard:

0 Points	=	no improvement
1 Point	=	slight improvement
2 Points	=	considerable improvement

4. Results

In the overall rating the results support a clear ranking of the investigated labels, but in some parts of the assessment the distances are marginal. In terms of the individual production stages a clear ranking of the label is no possible due to the fact that several labels reach the same rating. Nevertheless, obvious differences in the standards of the label can be found.

General Set of Criteria

General Requirements	Fattening Period	Transport and Slaughter
Restriction of Fattening Places	Feeding Devices	Thinning
Staff Qualifications	Drinking Devices	Catching and Loading
Veterinary Care	Restriction of Daily Weight Gains	Transport Time
Feed Requirements	Length of Fattening Period	Transport Conditions
Water Requirements	Group Size	Charge Density
Breeding Requirements	Stocking Density	Waiting Period
Stable Climate	Bedding Requirements	Stunning and Killing
Noise Restrictions	Manipulable Material	Transport Losses
Ventilation Equipment	Presence of Perches	Injured Animals
Lighting	Cold Scratching Area	Animals unfit for Human Consumption
Animal Control & Documentation	Access to Open Air Runs	Breast Blisters
Gait Score	Abstain from Surgical Interventions	Hock Burn
Use of Antibiotics & Documentation	Mortality Rate	Foot Pad Burn
Control Audits		

5. Conclusions







The present study shows, that the investigated labeling initiatives have established improvements above the legally defined minimum animal welfare standards of the EU for the various production stages. They can, thus, be seen as a serious response to the rising concerns of consumers recognized with respect to intensive livestock production systems. However, upon research, each label currently still has weaknesses in individual areas which will need improvement in the future.

6. Further Research

Economic assessments of the investigated labels are difficult since data on market penetration and additional costs, that arise at all steps of the value chain as well as for the consumers, are frequently missing so far. Data on the number of agricultural holdings participating in each labelling initiative and information about the number of slaughtered animals per year would also be important to gain an impression of the relevance of the examined labels in the market. Nevertheless, a thorough economic assessment of the concepts under study, is still to be made to finally assess the improvement which the individual labels contribute to animal welfare.

Evaluation of the Labels

Expressed as a percentage of the maximum achievable points

Label	Overall	Production Stages		
		General	Fattening	Slaughter
 Germany	45%	39%	54%	42%
 Germany	35%	32%	31%	42%
 Great Britain	34%	39%	31%	31%
 Switzerland	28%	25%	54%	4%
 Netherlands	23%	25%	31%	12%
 France	21%	25%	27%	12%
 Netherlands	21%	25%	27%	12%

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