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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council of 26 January 2026:
Animal welfare as a forward-looking priority in the Commission's work programme (2026 and beyond)
- *Information from Slovenia, supported by Austria, Belgium, Germany and Malta*

Animal welfare has long been an integral part of the European Union's agricultural and food policy and continues to enjoy strong and stable support among EU citizens and Member States alike. Over the years, the Union has built a solid framework of animal welfare standards, contributing not only to improved living conditions for animals, but also to better animal health, reduced use of antimicrobials, enhanced food safety, consumer trust and the long-term sustainability of agricultural production.

The Slovenian delegation would like to underline the importance of maintaining animal welfare as a visible and forward-looking priority in the work programme of the European Commission for 2026 and beyond. In this regard, we welcome the extensive preparatory work already undertaken by the Commission, including scientific mandates to EFSA, external studies, public consultations and reflections on indicators, digitalisation and import requirements. These processes provide a strong and credible basis for future policy development.

As the Commission enters a new phase of its mandate, it is important to ensure continuity between the analytical and consultative work already carried out and its translation into concrete policy initiatives. Predictability, clarity and reduction of bureaucratic burdens are essential for farmers, operators and other stakeholders, particularly in view of long-term investment decisions. At the same time, future initiatives should continue to reflect a balanced approach, combining ambition in animal welfare with feasibility, proportionality and appropriate transition periods as well as taking into account environmental, climate and biodiversity goals. In further developing animal welfare legislation, the Commission should place particular emphasis on simplification and reducing bureaucracy. The existing legislation should also be reviewed for potential reductions in bureaucracy.

In this context, animal welfare should be seen as a shared European value and a cross-cutting policy objective, closely linked to the EU's broader vision for agriculture and food systems. Continued progress in this area responds to societal expectations, strengthens the internal market and supports the competitiveness and resilience of EU agriculture.

Within the broader discussion on animal welfare, the issue of animals kept for fur production merits particular consideration. A growing number of Member States have already taken national measures to prohibit fur farming. Slovenia, for example, banned the farming of animals for fur production as early as 2013. Today, fur farming remains limited to only a small number of Member States, while recent scientific assessments confirm that current farming systems raise serious and structural animal welfare concerns.

Against this background, the Slovenian delegation invites the Commission to reflect on possible future-oriented approaches at EU level, taking into account the evolving situation across the Union. Such reflections could include, *inter alia*, consideration of a gradual phase-out of fur farming, accompanied by a sufficiently long transition period, as well as appropriate support measures for affected stakeholders. In parallel, a coherent approach could also examine the placing of fur and fur products on the EU market, with a view to ensuring consistency, legal certainty and a level playing field.

Any possible future reflections at EU level should be forward-looking and without prejudice to existing national choices or competences. They should focus on gradual and orderly transitions, provide sufficient time for adaptation, and avoid retrospective assessments. In this way, future discussions can contribute to legal certainty and predictability for all Member States and stakeholders, while remaining fully embedded in the broader EU animal welfare framework.

The Slovenian delegation would also like to highlight the importance of consumer awareness and informed choice. Without sustained consumer interest, there is no long-term economic basis for the production or marketing of products associated with lower animal welfare standards. Awareness-raising, transparency and access to clear information therefore play a crucial role in supporting policy objectives. In this regard, the Commission could continue to facilitate the exchange of best practices among Member States and explore appropriate EU-level communication tools to complement regulatory action.

In conclusion, the Slovenian delegation considers that animal welfare should remain firmly anchored as a forward-looking priority in the Commission's work programme for 2026 and beyond. Member States stand ready to engage constructively with the Commission in order to build on existing work, ensure coherence, simplification and continuity, and further develop EU animal welfare policy in a balanced, sustainable, predictable and inclusive manner.
