



Farm animal welfare legislation in Slovenia

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ABSTRACT

Slovenia is one of the candidate countries for the EU accession. Consequently, the legislation must be regulated in accordance with the EU directives. The important role in preparation of Slovenian farm animal welfare legislation has the Animal Welfare Council (AWC), established in 2001.

(Keywords: animal welfare, animal protection, legislation, Slovenia)

INTRODUCTION

Slovenia is a young country. Animal Protection Act was adopted after eight years of its independence, in December 1999. According to the article 38 in the mentioned act, the minister in competence of animal husbandry must establish Animal Welfare Council (AWC) and name its members. The mentioned article also defines the terms of reference of AWC:

- monitoring animal welfare conditions and suggesting measures,
- suggesting criteria for approval of experiments on animals,
- giving opinions and suggestions on animal welfare legislation in preparation and on other animal welfare issues,
- giving opinions and suggestions on other issues on request from government officials.

In line with the sixth paragraph of article 39 of *Animal Protection Act* (1999), Minister of agriculture, forestry and food adopted the *Animal Welfare Council Rule* (2000). The rule lays down the structure, tasks, competence and work procedure of AWC. AWC was established in May 2001. It has nine members: five university teachers and researchers from the fields of veterinary medicine, medicine, pharmacy, biology, animal science, one representative from meat processing industry, one from farmers association and two representatives from animal welfare organisations.

ANIMAL WELFARE LEGISLATION ADOPTED BEFORE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AWC

Prior to the establishment of AWC some animal welfare legislation was adopted, most importantly *Animal Protection Act* (1999). The following rules and one decree were also adopted: *Animal Shelters Rule* (2000), *Rule on Ethical Commission for Animals in the Experiments* (2000), *Transport of Animals Rule* (2000, 2001) and *Decree on Rearing Free-living Animals in Captivity* (2001).

Animal Protection Act consists of the following ten parts:

I. General provisions; II. Protection of animals (rearing of animals, transport, ill and injured animals, procedures on animals, experiments on animals, slaughter and killing); III. Care of abandoned animals; IV. Animal protection organisations operating in the public interest; V. Awards and acknowledgements; VI. Animal welfare council; VII. Competence of official authorities; VIII. Control; IX. Penalties; X. Transitional and final provisions.

The opinion of AWC is that the act is not well prepared. At many points it is too detailed, it includes the provisions that should have been included in the rules. The act should be general, not including the provisions that might change shortly because of the new scientific evidence. Therefore, one of the important tasks of AWC in the near future will be the amendment of the Animal Protection Act. Probably the act would be better if it were reviewed by AWC before the adoption. However, AWC was not established at that time.

THE WORK OF AWC ON HARMONISATION OF SLOVENIAN ANIMAL WELFARE LEGISLATION WITH THE EU LEGISLATION

The first important task of AWC after its establishment was the revision of the following drafts:

- Protection of Rearing Animals Rule
- Protection of Animals in Experiments Rule

Both drafts were prepared by Veterinary administration of Slovenia in accordance with the EU directives. During the past five months, AWC has thoroughly revised the Protection of Rearing Animals Rule. The provisions were checked for the accordance with EU directives. The rule is prepared in accordance with the following EU directives:

- *Council Directive 91/629/EEC laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves,*
- *Council Directive 91/630/EEC laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs,*
- *Council Directive 97/2/EC amending Directive 91/629/EEC laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves,*
- *Commission decision 97/182/EC amending the Annex to Directive 91/629/EEC laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves,*
- *Council Directive 98/58/EC concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes,*
- *Council Directive 1999/74/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens,*
- *Commission decision 2000/50/EC concerning minimum requirements for the inspection of holdings on which animals are kept for farming purposes*
- *Council Directive 2001/88/EC amending Directive 91/630/EEC laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs,*
- *Commission Directive 2001/93/EC amending Directive 91/630/EEC laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs,*
- *Commission Directive 2002/4/EC on the registration of establishments keeping laying hens, covered by Council Directive 1999/74/EC.*

The Protection of Rearing Animals Rule has a short general part, laying down minimum standards for all rearing animals. It includes: I. General provisions, II. Protection of rearing animals; III. Transitional and final provisions.

The general part is followed by appendices. The first three are laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves, pigs and laying hens. The fourth appendix is a form for annual report, prepared by inspectors. The main standards from the first three appendices are presented here.

Appendix 1: Protection of calves

Calves, older than 8 weeks, must be housed in groups. The minimal space allowance is presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1

Minimal space allowance per group housed calf

Live weight	Minimal space allowance per animal (m²)
less than 150 kg	1.5
150 – 220 kg	1.7
220 kg and more	1.8

Calves must not be kept permanently in darkness. Natural or artificial lighting must be provided between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m with the intensity of at least 80 lux. All calves must be inspected by the person responsible for the animals – the calves kept inside at least twice a day and the calves kept outside at least once a day. Permanent tether is prohibited. The lying area must be comfortable, clean, adequately drained and must not adversely affect the calves. Appropriate bedding must be provided for calves less than two weeks old. The diet must be adapted to the age, weight, behavioural and physiological needs of the calves.

Appendix 2: Protection of pigs

The minimal unobstructed floor area available to each weaner or rearing pig reared in a group is presented in *Table 2*.

Table 2

Minimal floor area per pig in a group

Average live weight (or category)	Minimal floor area (m²)
10 kg or less	0.15
10-20 kg	0.20
20-30 kg	0.30
30-50 kg	0.40
50-85 kg	0.55
85-110 kg	0.65
more than 110 kg	1.00
Gilts after service	1.64
Sows	2.25
Boars (in pens not used for natural service)	6.00
Boars (in pens used also for natural service)	10.00

When sows or gilts are kept in groups of 6 or less than 6 animals the unobstructed floor area must be increased by 10%, while in the groups of 40 or more animals the unobstructed floor area may be decreased by 10%. For pregnant animals, part of the area required must be of continuous solid floor (at least 0.95 m² per gilt and 1.30 m² per sow). A maximum of 15% is reserved for drainage openings. When concrete slatted floors are used, the maximum width of the openings and the minimum slat width must be as presented in *Table 3*.

Table 3

The requirements for concrete slatted floors

Categories of pigs	Maximum width of the openings (mm)	Minimum slat width (mm)
Piglets	11	50
Weaners	14	50
Rearing pigs	18	80
Gilts after service and sows	20	80

Pigs must be kept in light with an intensity of at least 40 lux for a period of at least 8 hours per day. The level of noise should not exceed 85 dBA. Constant or sudden noise should be avoided. Animals must be inspected at least once a day by the person in charge. The lying area must be clean, dry and must not have any harmful effects on animals. The diet must be adapted to the age, weight, behavioural and physiological needs of the pigs. Pigs must be fed at least once a day, the access to fresh water must be permanent.

Boar pens must allow the boar to turn around, hear, smell and see other pigs. Sows and gilts must be kept in groups from 4 weeks after the service to 1 week before the expected time of farrowing. The side walls in the pen where the group is kept must be longer than 2.8 m; in case of less than 6 animals in a group the side walls must be longer than 2.4 m.

In the farrowing crate, the lying area must be clean, dry and comfortable. Suitable nesting material must be given to the animals, unless it is not technically feasible because of the slurry system. To satisfy their hunger and the need to chew, all pregnant sows and gilts must be given a sufficient quantity of bulky or high-fibre food as well as high energy food. The use of tethers for sows and gilts is prohibited. In the nests for piglets the floor must be solid or covered with mat, or littered with straw or any other suitable material. If castration or tail docking is practised after the seventh day of life, it can be performed only under anaesthetic. Reduction of corner teeth by grinding or clipping must be done not later than the seventh day of life. Piglets should not be weaned at less than 28 days of age. The piglets may be weaned up to seven days earlier if they are moved into specialised housings which are emptied and thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before the introduction of the new group and which are separated from housings where sows are kept. Weaners and rearing pigs should be kept in stable groups with as little mixing as possible.

Appendix 3: Protection of laying hens

The animals must be inspected by the person in charge at least once a day. The lighting regime must follow the daily rhythm of the animals – there must be 8 hours of

uninterrupted darkness, allowing the hens to rest. Beside the general provisions, applicable to all rearing systems, the provisions specific for the different systems are stated. These systems are: alternative systems, unenriched cages and enriched cages.

For the alternative systems the provisions are as follows:

- either linear feeders providing at least 10 cm per bird or circular feeders providing at least 4 cm per bird,
- either continuous drinking troughs providing at least 2.5 cm per hen or circular drinking troughs providing at least 1 cm per hen,
- at least one nest for every seven hens; in case of group nests at least 1 m² nest space for 120 hens,
- adequate perches (at least 15 cm per hen), not placed above the litter,
- at least 250 m² of littered area per hen, the litter occupying at least one third of the ground surface.

Four levels are maximum in the systems with more levels. The headroom between the levels must be at least 45 cm. If hens have the access to open runs, the access holes must be at least 35 cm high; a total opening of 2 m must be available per group of 1000 hens. Open runs must be appropriate to the stocking density and to the nature of the ground, they must provide shelter from inclement weather and predators and they must have fences. Stocking density must not exceed nine laying hens per m² usable area. If the usable area corresponds to the available ground surface, stocking density may be 12 hens per m².

For the unenriched cages the provisions are as follows:

at least 550 cm² of cage area per hen, measured in a horizontal plane,
at least 10 cm of length of feed trough per hen,
at least 10 cm of length of continuous drinking channel per hen, or at least two nipple drinkers or two cups in a cage,
cages must be at least 40 cm high over at least 65% of the cage area and not less than 35 cm at any point,
floor slope must not exceed 14% or 8°; if floors have other than rectangular wire mesh, steeper slopes are permitted,
cages must have claw-shortening devices.

For the enriched cages the provisions are as follows:

- at least 750 cm² of cage area per hen, 600 cm² of which shall be usable. The height of the cage must be at least 20 cm at any point (other than that above the useable area). No cage shall have a total area that is less than 2000 cm²,
- nest,
- litter – such that pecking and scratching are possible,
- perches, allowing 15 cm per hen,
- at least 12 cm of length of feed trough per hen,
- at least two nipple drinkers or two cups within the reach of each hen,
- cages must have claw-shortening devices.

In this short description no dates when the different requirements come into force are mentioned, because some of them might still be open for negotiations with EU. The Protection of Rearing Animals Rule was the first one thoroughly discussed and revised by AWC. The next in line is the Protection of Animals in the Experiments Rule, which will be presented at another occasion.

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