

EFBA's response to the Report of the Commission on options for animal welfare labelling and the establishment of a European Network of Reference Centres for the protection and welfare of animals-December 2009

Fur-farmed animals: our views

The European Fur Breeders' Association (EFBA) is strongly committed to maintaining the highest standards of welfare for fur-farmed animals throughout their whole life cycle.

As such **EFBA welcomes the European Commission's report** on the options for animal welfare labelling and the establishment of a European Network of Reference Centres for the protection and welfare of animals.

Animal welfare awareness and transparency: a 'must' have

Awareness of consumers by means of labelling or public information campaigns or other means is a very difficult question to address as the supply chain of fur-products is extremely complex (see Annex1). There are a significant number of parties involved within the chain and awareness should first start with the fur-buyers at the Auction Houses before going through the manufacturers (mainly China), wholesalers and retailers, and finally reaching the end-consumers.

Today, there is indeed an increasing societal interest for more information on product origin and welfare conditions in our fur-farms. But consumer awareness is at very early stage because consumers are usually not informed adequately. There is some confusion when the word 'welfare standards' is used as the standards are usually unknown.

This is why we believe that **modern animal production has to be transparent and that the welfare of farmed-animals is an essential feature of that transparency.** But before information on the welfare of the animals can be presented to the consumer and the general public, there must be common ways of defining and measuring it.

Therefore EFBA is supporting the options of EU harmonised requirements for the mandatory or voluntary use of claims in relation to animal welfare based on solid scientific background (option 1 or 4 of the animal welfare labelling report). These are the 2 most feasible options.

A harmonised EU-wide animal welfare label (option 6) in an ideal world could also be envisaged but is the least feasible option at this stage as it would severely impact the current complex supply chain process. A feasibility study has to be undertaken to better understand the impacts of such an option on our business.

Standardised animal welfare indicators: research leads the way

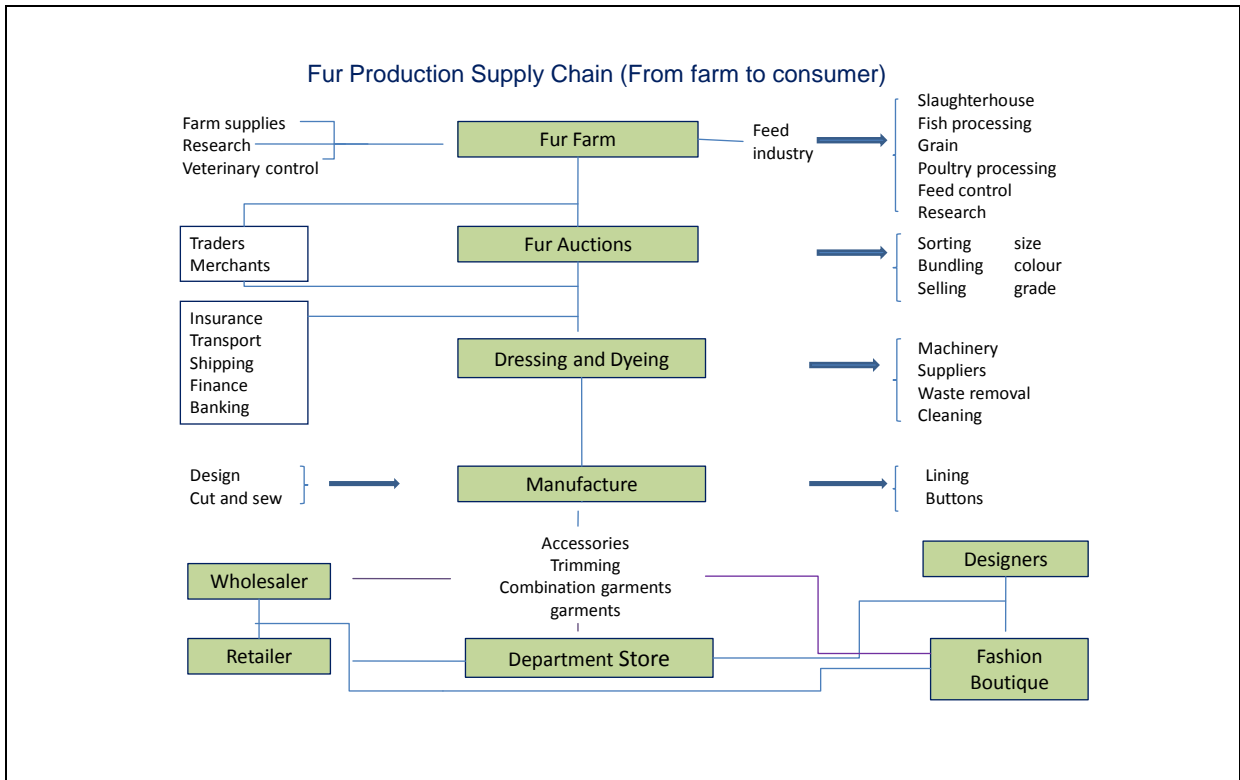
During the period 2004-2009, the EU-funded Welfare Quality project developed general principles for animal welfare assessment at farm level: good feeding, good housing, good health and appropriate behavior. Detailed welfare-assessment protocols have been published for cattle, pigs, laying hens and broiler chickens. They all have a firm scientific basis.

EFBA strongly supports the use of WQ as basis for the elaboration of animal based scientific indicators for all farmed produced animals and the creation of a European Network of Reference Centres (ENRC) for the protection & welfare of animals. Indeed this could constitute a very valid and concrete option to provide technical assistance and to get the certification from the EU.

As these WQ protocols are species-specific, they can be further developed provided that sufficient scientific knowledge on the biology and welfare of species is available. Welfare of the most important fur-farmed species has been significantly studied over the last 25 years. **EFBA has initiated in September 2009 a welfare-quality-like project on fur-farmed animals (WelFur). The main outcome will be the definition & documentation of welfare-assessment protocols for the mink, the fox and the Finn raccoon by the end of 2010.**

The implementation at the farm level will start as from 2011 onwards and is within the scope of WelFur. We know at this stage that assessors will have to be sourced by an independent control/certification body in order to be accepted by the consumer and the general public. **Who will bear the cost linked to welfare investments and compliance controls is a critical question that our sector wants to raise.** To benefit the farmers, these costs should ideally be transformed into consumer adding-value and ultimately having the consumer paying for it. Today we do not have proof that this is can be achieved. **This is why we recommend a prudent approach and a sound political debate around this issue.**

Annex 1



EU fur-farming sector: key figures 2008

- **6,000** fur farms in the EU Member States.
- **57.5% (28.7 million pelts)** of worldwide **mink**-fur production and **51.5%** (2.3 million pelts) of worldwide **fox**-fur production come from European farms.
- **China** is the second largest worldwide producer of fur pelts and the **biggest competitor** to European fur farmers.
- Fur-farming provides an efficient use of more than **1 million tones of animal by-products** each year from the fishing and meat industries.
- The fur sector creates up to **120,000 jobs** in Europe.
- The **value** of EU farmed fur amounts to **€1.5 billion**.

About EFBA

The European Fur Breeders' Association (EFBA) represents the umbrella organisation of 15 national fur breeders' associations in Europe: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden. Fur-farmed species cover minks (Mustelidae family), fitches (Mustela putorius family), foxes (Vulpes and Alopex families), finn raccoons (Nyctereutes procyonoides family) and chinchillas (Chinchilla laniger family).

EFBA works to promote a realistic public image of the European fur-farming sector, based on a policy of openness and transparency. The organisation strives to standardise European fur-farming practices and legislation based upon high welfare standards, scientific evidence and fur-farming's socio-economic sustainability.