



Organic - part of the solution !

ANIMAL WELFARE: what's good for the animal is good for humans too

Although the EU has some basic animal welfare legislation in place, livestock farming is still characterised by a short-termist preoccupation with productivity and yield. The stance of organic proponents is that long-term productivity, high product quality and ethical responsibility all matter, and require consideration for the overall health and welfare of the animal.

With organic animals, well-being comes first

Animal welfare requirements are part of any and every organic standard. The following are the core principles of these requirements:

- **Allowing animals to display their natural behaviour.** Animals can display their natural behaviours only if their living conditions replicate key features of their native habitat, with the necessary space and provisions. Organic systems are characterised by low stocking densities, outdoor access, and freedom of movement for animals. Feeding behaviours are also respected; for example, nose-rings for pigs are banned because they prevent natural rooting behaviours.
- **Welfare before productivity.** Breeding programmes in organic agriculture aim at a holistic approach, balancing productivity, longevity, adaption to environmental conditions and conservation of biodiversity. Organic farmers typically give preference to the life-time productivity of their animals rather than the yearly productivity.
- **Preserving the health of the animals' environment.** If too many animals are kept per hectare of farmland, the manure generated cannot be absorbed by the farm ecosystem. The excess can end up in groundwater or the atmosphere. The EU nitrates directive has addressed this problem, but organic systems are still the best performers: limited stocking densities on organic farms secure a balanced nutrient supply to soil and plants without harming the environment.
- **Controlling and preventing disease systemically.** With the exception of vaccines, organic farmers do not apply any preventive allopathic medication. Instead, they strengthen the immune system of their animals through careful hygiene, combined with a husbandry and feeding regime adapted to animals' needs, following the systems approach. If necessary, individual animals may be treated curatively to safeguard their welfare. The use of homeopathic or naturopathic cures instead of allopathic drugs avoids side effects, residual antibiotics in meat and other products, and development of resistant pathogens.

EU Policies must ensure high welfare standards for farm animals

The Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006-2010 is a road map for the development and promotion of animal welfare legislation within the European Community for the coming years. In constructing policy frameworks around it, the EU should draw lessons from the specific, holistic and systemic approaches of organic farming. In particular, the organic sector can contribute with best practice examples for livestock systems.