(English version)

Question for written answer E-002280/26
to the Commission
Saskia Bricmont (Verts/ALE)
(3 June 2026)

Subject: Equivalence requirements for imported animal products and timeline for Commission action

In its Vision for Agriculture and Food, the Commission committed to proposing rules that set the same animal welfare and animal production standards for imported products as those applying to EU farmers. Since then, this intention has been publicly and repeatedly reaffirmed. This commitment has garnered broad support, with farmers' organisations and civil society groups across the EU calling for mirror clauses, as a matter of competitive fairness and ethical consistency. The current asymmetry undermines EU farmers, who must meet standards that their foreign competitors can ignore while accessing the single market. This also risks triggering an animal welfare leakage effect, ultimately undermining the EU's animal welfare and environmental objectives.

Legal pathways exist within the World Trade Organisation framework, notably under GATT Article XX(a) on public morals and Article XX(b) on human and animal health, provided that measures are designed in a proportionate and non-discriminatory manner.

Can the Commission clarify:

1. What concrete legislative steps it next intends to take, and by when, in order to materialise its commitment?

2. How will it coordinate across its relevant directorates-general, including the Directorate-General for Trade, the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety and the Directorate-General for International Partnerships?

3. How will it inform and cooperate with trade partners regarding the future legislation so as to prevent allegations of 'protectionism'?

Submitted: 3.6.2026

Answer given by Mr Várhelyi on behalf of the European Commission
(28 July 2026)

As announced in the EU Vision on Agriculture and Food ([1]), the Commission is preparing revision of the existing EU animal welfare legislation through a sector-by-sector approach.

To support this work, a Call for Evidence ([2]) was launched in June 2025, from which follows that the option of requiring equivalent animal welfare standards to apply at imports is being reflected upon by the Commission as part of this exercise.

As further announced in the Livestock Strategy ([3]) of 7 July 2026, by the end of 2026, the Commission intends to propose a targeted revision of animal welfare rules for laying hens and broilers, and by the second quarter of 2027, a similar proposal will address pig welfare.

These proposals aim to follow-up on the Citizens' Initiative 'End the cage age' and will also provide an opportunity to introduce equivalent animal welfare requirements for imported products in those sectors, in line with the World Trade Organisation rules.

For any legislative proposal the coordination between relevant Directorates-general (DGs) of the Commission is ensured by discussions in the framework of the Interservice Coordination Group, which includes all concerned DGs.

Together with the formal Interservice Consultation which precedes all legislative proposals, it ensures coordination between services in the preparation of legislative initiatives adopted jointly by the College of Commissioners.

During the preparation of the legislative proposal the Commission is consulting all relevant stakeholders, including international trading partners, supported by an external study, published with the proposals, which also includes certain case studies on impacts for third countries.

([1]) COM/2025/75 final.
([2]) https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14671-On-farm-animal-welfare-for-certain-animals-modernisation-of-EU-legislation_en.
([3]) Commission Communication « EU strategy on livestock », COM(2026) 576 final.

After the adoption of the legislative proposal, the Commission intends to reach out to third countries to explain the proposed changes and adaptations needed.